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I'm Done With Wrestling, NOW WHAT?

By Matt Brzycki



A few years ago, shortly after the end of yet another wrestling season, a senior wrestler stopped by my office in the fitness center and asked, "Now that I'm done with wrestling, what should I do?"

The answer to his question is of utmost importance. At the conclusion of every wrestling season, thousands of scholastic and collegiate athletes hang up their headgear for the last time. Their careers as competitive wrestlers have come to an end. For many of these wrestlers, though, their athletic lifestyles also come to an end. Some

will feel that there is no longer a reason to do any training; others will opt to take a little time off from training. But a little time off frequently becomes a long time off. And before you know it, their "six-pack abs" look more like a keg.

The sad truth is that many active athletes become inactive adults. (And this is not just true of wrestlers, by the way – it applies to *all* athletes.) So after they complete their wrestling careers, what should wrestlers do to stay off the "inactive roster"?

LIFE AFTER WRESTLING

There are three components of physical training that are necessary to enhance "life after wrestling": flexibility training, aerobic training and strength training. The guidelines for these components can be organized under the acronym "FIT" which stands for Frequency, Intensity, Time and Type. Another program component that must be considered is nutritional training.

What follows is a closer look at these four components.

Flexibility Training

An adequate level of flexibility is needed to perform daily activities. As people age, they tend to become less flexible. But this does not appear to be a result of the aging process. Rather, the likely culprit is an inactive lifestyle. The best way to become more flexible is through flexibility training.

Flexibility can be enhanced by incorporating these guidelines:

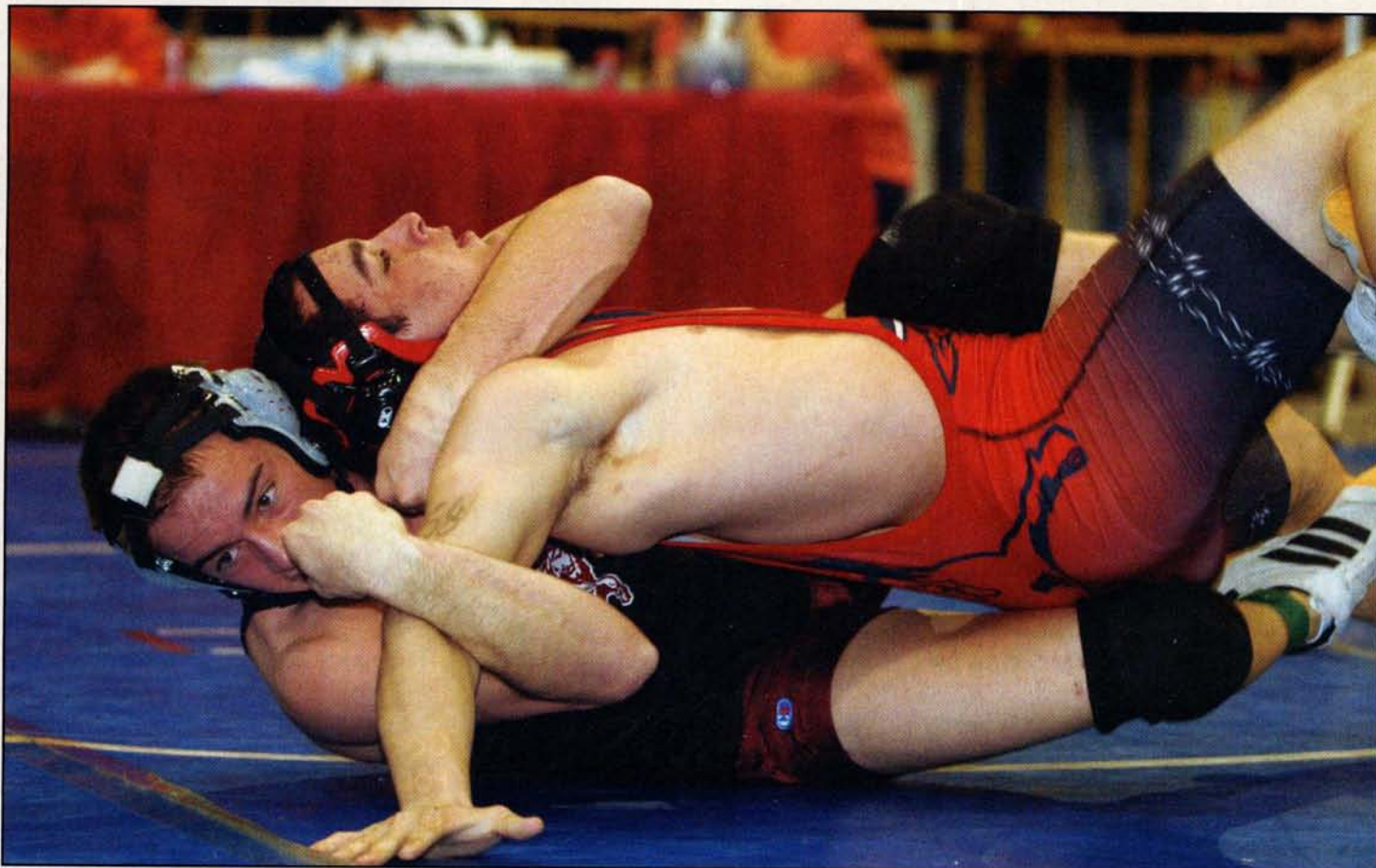
Frequency

It is important to do stretching movements on a regular basis. Preferably, stretching should be done daily.

Intensity

Of the three components of physical training, flexibility training requires the least intensity (or effort). Each stretch

2006 Rocky Mountain Nationals 15 and under 158 pounds - Cody Yohn (Colorado) gains some back points against opponent Matthew Chavez (Colorado), the second place finisher after wrestle-backs. Yohn won this quarter finals match 11-5 and his 2006 Division at the Monster Match, the Who's Bad, and the Rocky Mountain Nationals. Photo by Dean Vande Berg.



should be done comfortably in a pain-free manner. Individuals can stretch farther by relaxing during the stretch as well as inhaling and exhaling normally without holding their breath.

Finally, an attempt should be made to stretch progressively farther than previously. This will ensure that improvements in flexibility continue.

Time

Most authorities recommend that the stretched position be held for about 30 - 60 seconds. A comprehensive stretching routine can be done in as little as 10 - 15 minutes per session.

Type

There are two main types of stretching: static and ballistic. However, it is safer to do static stretching (under control without any bouncing, bobbing or jerking movements). Also, flexibility training should address the muscles that affect the major joints.

Aerobic Training

The best indicator of overall health is aerobic fitness. And the best way to improve aerobic fitness is through aerobic training (which is also known as "cardiovascular training" or, simply, "cardio").

Aerobic fitness can be increased by implementing this information:

Frequency

According to the American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM), aerobic training should be done 3 - 5 days per week. Training less than three days per week does not appear adequate enough to promote any meaningful changes in aerobic fitness; training more than five days per week produces a negligible improvement in aerobic fitness (which usually is not worth the time spent).

Intensity

To receive a benefit from aerobic training, individuals must maintain a certain level of intensity. Specifically, a "training zone" of 60 - 90% of the age-predicted maximum heart rate should be used. To find a rough estimate of the age-predicted maximum heart rate in beats per minute, simply subtract age from 220. For instance, the age-predicted maximum heart rate of a 22-year-old individual is 198 [220 - 22 = 198]. To find the recommended heart-rate training zone, multiply the age-predicted maximum heart rate by 0.60 and 0.90. In this example, the 22-year-old individual would need to maintain a heart rate of about 119 - 178 beats per minute [198 x 0.60 = 118.8; 198 x 0.90 = 178.2].

To make aerobic training progressively more difficult, an individual should (1) complete the same distance at a faster pace (that is, in a shorter amount of time); (2)

cover a greater distance at the same pace; or (3) gradually increase both the distance and the pace.

Time

The ACSM recommends that aerobic training be done for 20 - 60 minutes of continuous or intermittent activity. "Intermittent" means that multiple - but briefer - sessions can be done on the same day. As an example, two 15-minute workouts in one day would equal 30 minutes of aerobic training. This is especially helpful for individuals who do not always have a block of 30 minutes available for aerobic training.

Keep in mind, too, that the time of the activity is inversely proportional to the intensity of the activity. So, the length of effort can be relatively brief if the level of effort is relatively high.

Type

The combined application of the aforementioned guidelines concerning the frequency, intensity and time of aerobic training provides a meaningful workload for the aerobic system. If these three ingredients produce the same caloric expenditure, the physiological adaptations will be similar regardless of the type of aerobic activity that is performed. Therefore, a variety of activities can be employed to increase aerobic fitness.

The preferred types of aerobic activities are those that require a continuous effort, are rhythmic in nature and involve large amounts of muscle mass. Popular indoor activities that can be used to stimulate aerobic fitness include jumping rope, swimming and doing stationary exercises on specialized equipment such as a cross-country ski machine, elliptical machine,

rowing machine, stairclimber/stepper, stationary bicycle (upright or recumbent) and treadmill. Popular outdoor activities that can be used to stimulate aerobic fitness include bicycling, cross-country skiing, jogging/running and rowing.

To avoid boredom, it is important to change the activities from time to time. Fortunately, aerobic training permits a large amount of variety in terms of activity selections. Activities should be enjoyable and appropriate for an individual's level of skill and orthopedic health.

Strength Training

Even when competitive wrestling is over, having an optimal level of muscular strength can be a valuable commodity. Needless to say, strength training is the best way to improve muscular strength. Plus, strength training can improve body composition by increasing muscle mass and decreasing body fat.


The following guidelines will help to improve muscular strength:

Frequency

Everyone has different tolerances for exercise but a period of about 48 - 72 hours is usually necessary for the muscles and energy systems to recover sufficiently from an intense bout of strength training. Effectively, this means that strength training should be performed 2 - 3 times per week on nonconsecutive days such as on Monday, Wednesday and Friday or Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday. (Note that this assumes total-body workouts.)

Intensity

Strength training must be challenging.



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The effort should produce or approach muscular fatigue. Each set should be done to the point where no further repetitions can be completed (with good technique, of course).

Equally important is to make the efforts progressively more demanding. In subsequent workouts, then, an attempt should be made to (1) do more repetitions with the same amount of resistance; (2) do the same number of repetitions with more resistance; or (3) do more repetitions with more resistance.

Time

Workouts in the weight room need not be marathon efforts. If a high level of intensity is used, 45 - 60 minutes of training will be enough to produce significant increases in muscular strength. Remember, the ultimate goal is to produce an ample amount of mus-

cular fatigue, not to see how long that an individual can stay in the weight room.

Type

A workout must be comprehensive in that it should address all of the major muscle groups: the hips, legs, torso and mid-section. This can be accomplished by implementing various types of equipment such as free weights and machines. Individuals will not develop in a different way just because they used different equipment. Studies have found similar responses between groups that used free weights and groups that used machines. For example, one study found no significant differences in strength, body girth and body composition between a group that used free weights and two groups that used machines.

Nutritional Training

Transitioning from a competitive wrestler to a former wrestler usually results in two

major developments that have a direct impact on the potential to gain weight. First, individuals exercise less thereby decreasing their caloric expenditure. Second, individuals eat more thereby increasing their caloric intake. Doing either one of these can be problematic; doing both of these can be catastrophic.

Remember, gaining, losing or maintaining weight is simply a matter of arithmetic. If you consume the same number of calories that you expend, it will not affect any change in weight; if you expend more calories than you consume, it will produce a loss in weight; and if you consume more calories than you expend, it will produce a gain in weight.

After their wrestling careers have ended, it is certainly true that many wrestlers will gravitate toward a weight that is more natural and more desirable. But all too often, the increase in weight is done too excessively and/or too rapidly. The result is an increase in weight that is mostly in the form of fat, not muscle.

So how can individuals ensure that any weight gain is primarily muscle? They should not consume more than about 350 - 700 calories above their normal daily needs. This equates to a weight gain of about 1 - 2 pounds per week. If the gain is more than about 1% of their bodyweight per week, it is likely that some of the gain was due to an increase in fat rather than muscle. On the other hand, if the gain is less than about 1% of their bodyweight per week and is the product of a demanding strength-training program in conjunction with a moderate increase in caloric intake, it is likely that most of the gain was due to an increase in muscle rather than fat. And that, of course, is the preferred outcome.

THE LAST REP

After your last season as a wrestler, it is normal to take a well-deserved breather from training. Be advised, though, that the longer the breather the harder it will be for you to resume training. Also of note is the fact that some former wrestlers must learn to motivate themselves when, suddenly, there are no coaches barking instructions, no teammates offering encouragement and no fans cheering performances.

Remember, your wrestling days may be over but the same need not be true of your training days.

Matt Brzycki has authored, co-authored or edited 15 books on strength and fitness including *Wrestling Strength: The Competitive Edge*, *Wrestling Strength: Prepare to Win* and *Wrestling Strength: Dare to Excel*. These three wrestling books are available at all major bookstores or through Cardinal Publishers Group (800-296-0481).

Craig Trampe (Dana College) is holding on for more riding time against John Chidester (Campbellsville University). Trampe won by technical fall 20-5. Photo by Richard Fergola.

