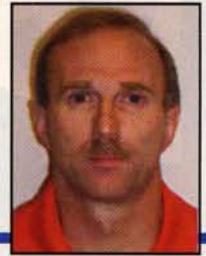


The Youth Physical Fitness Program

By Matt Brzycki

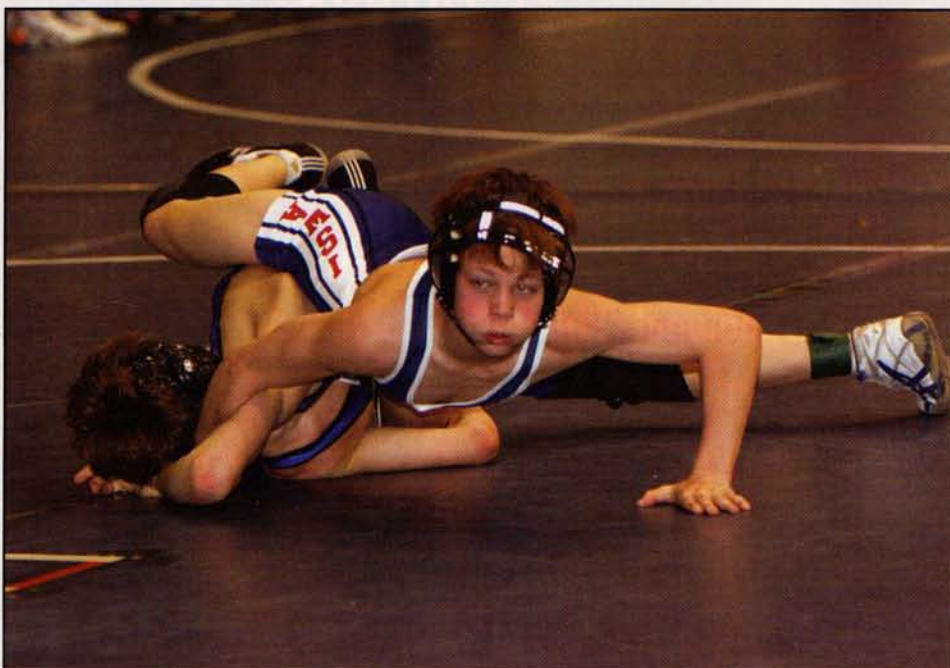


The United States Marine Corps Youth Physical Fitness (YPF) Program began in 1958 as an experimental competition at one high school in New York City. In 1966, it evolved into a national competition that was held in Washington, DC. Since that time, the YPF Program has grown considerably. The YPF Program is patterned after the Marine Corps Physical Fitness Test (PFT) that is administered to Marine recruits at Parris Island (SC) and San Diego (CA). It is a major part of the U. S. Marines Youth Foundation, a non-profit organization that is currently headed by General Alfred M. Gray (a former Commandant of the Marine Corps).

WHAT IT IS

The YPF Program consists of five events: sit-ups, push-ups, a standing broad jump, pull-ups and a 300-yard shuttle run (done in that sequence). The participants are given three minutes of recovery between events, making this a relatively quick but highly challenging test. A maximum of 100 points is awarded in each of the events. Here is a detailed look at the guidelines for the five events:

USA Wrestling 2006 National Middle School Duals 95 lbs. - Luke Schofield (Indiana Blue) major decisioned Erin McCauley (Kentucky) 12-1. Photo by Chuck Bennett.



Sit-Ups

Competitors lay on their backs with their feet flat on the floor. The legs are bent such that the thighs form a 45-degree angle with the floor. The fingers are interlocked behind the head. The feet are secured in place by a counter who holds the ankles. (The counter cannot hold the ankles in a way that assists the competitor.)

The forehead must be brought directly above or extended past the knees in the up position and the backs of the hands must touch the floor in the down position. At no time can the knees be spread farther than shoulderwidth apart. At the beginning of a repetition, the buttocks cannot be raised off the floor by more than one inch.

Doing 100 sit-ups in two minutes earns 100 points. No points are given for the first 10 sit-ups. One point is given for each of the next 80 sit-ups (so that doing the first 90 sit-ups earns 80 points); two points are given for each of the last 10 sit-ups.

Push-Ups

Competitors place their hands flat on the floor directly below their shoulders. The body is positioned in a straight line from the shoulders to the feet without any arch in the back. Only the hands and feet are allowed to touch the floor. The elbows are "locked" with the arms forming a straight line that is

perpendicular to the floor. The feet cannot be spread apart farther than one foot. A counter lays face down in front of the competitor. The counter places one hand flat on the floor under a boy's sternum (breastbone) or one fist (with the thumb on top of the fist) under a girl's chin.

The body must be lowered to the floor by bending the elbows. Boys must touch the back of the counter's hand with their sternum; girls must touch the top of the counter's fist with their chin. The body must remain in a straight line throughout the duration of the entire exercise. The elbows must "lock" in the up position. The repetitions are to be done in a continuous motion with a pause of no more than a one-thousand count in the up position.

Doing 60 push-ups earns 100 points. Since the push-ups must be done in a continuous motion, a time limit is not needed for this event. The scoring for push-ups is the most complicated. Eight points are given for the first push-up. Two points are given for every push-up thereafter to and including the 17th push-up. One point is given for the 18th push-up to and including the 44th push-up. Three points are given for the 45th push-up and two points are given for every push-up thereafter until the 60th one.

Standing Broad Jump

Competitors stand with their feet spread apart comfortably and their toes just behind an established take-off line. The knees may be flexed and the arms swung back and forth in a rhythmic manner to propel the body. The competitors jump forward as far as possible, landing on one foot or both feet. The distance is measured from the take-off line to the nearest point of contact on the landing. A "foul" occurs when the competitor is past the take-off line before jumping. This is counted as an attempt but not measured. Each competitor has three minutes to do three jumps with the best jump being counted.

Doing a jump of 9 feet 10 inches earns 100 points. No points are given for a jump that is 5 feet 8 inches or less. A jump of 5 feet 8.5 inches earns one point. One point is given for each half inch farther than this distance. So a competitor who jumps two feet more than this - to 7 feet 8.5 inches - would earn 49 points. (In other words, each foot longer than 5 feet 8.5 inches is worth 24 points.)

Pull-Ups

Competitors hang from a bar with their palms facing away from their body. The arms and legs must be completely straight. The body must be pulled straight up until the chin is over the bar. The arms are to be fully extended (straight) in the down position. No kicking, swinging or thrashing is permitted. Competitors are allowed to rest in the down position.

Doing 30 pull-ups in two minutes earns 100 points. Three points are given for each of the first 20 pull-ups (so that doing 20 pull-ups earns 60 points) and four points are given for each of the last 10 pull-ups.

300-Yard Shuttle Run

Competitors must run back and forth five times around two pylons that are placed 60 yards apart. Stated otherwise, the competitors must run five 60-yard sprints. In making a turn, a competitor who knocks over a pylon must return it to an upright position and as close as possible to the original location.

Doing the 300-yard shuttle run in 44.00 seconds earns 100 points. No points are given for a run that is 69.00 seconds or more. A run of 68.75 seconds earns one point. One point is given for each 0.25 seconds faster (less) than this time. So a competitor who runs 15 seconds faster than this - to 53.75 seconds - would earn 61 points. (In other words, each second faster than 68.75 seconds is worth 4 points.) A competitor who does not complete the run or does not re-set a knocked-over pylon gets no points.

LOGISTICAL NOTES

Each team has 5 - 6 competitors of the same gender in grades 9 - 12 and one coach. Although a team can have up to six competitors, only the top five scores count toward the team's total points. If a team has five competitors, all of their scores will count.

In a competition, each event should include six stations so that all six members of a team can perform the event at the same time. In other words, the entire team would do their sit-ups together then proceed to the push-ups and so on. This way, each team moves through the competition as a unit.

COMPETITIONS

Local, state and regional meets are held throughout the year. In addition, high schools have their own competitions to determine who will represent them against other schools.

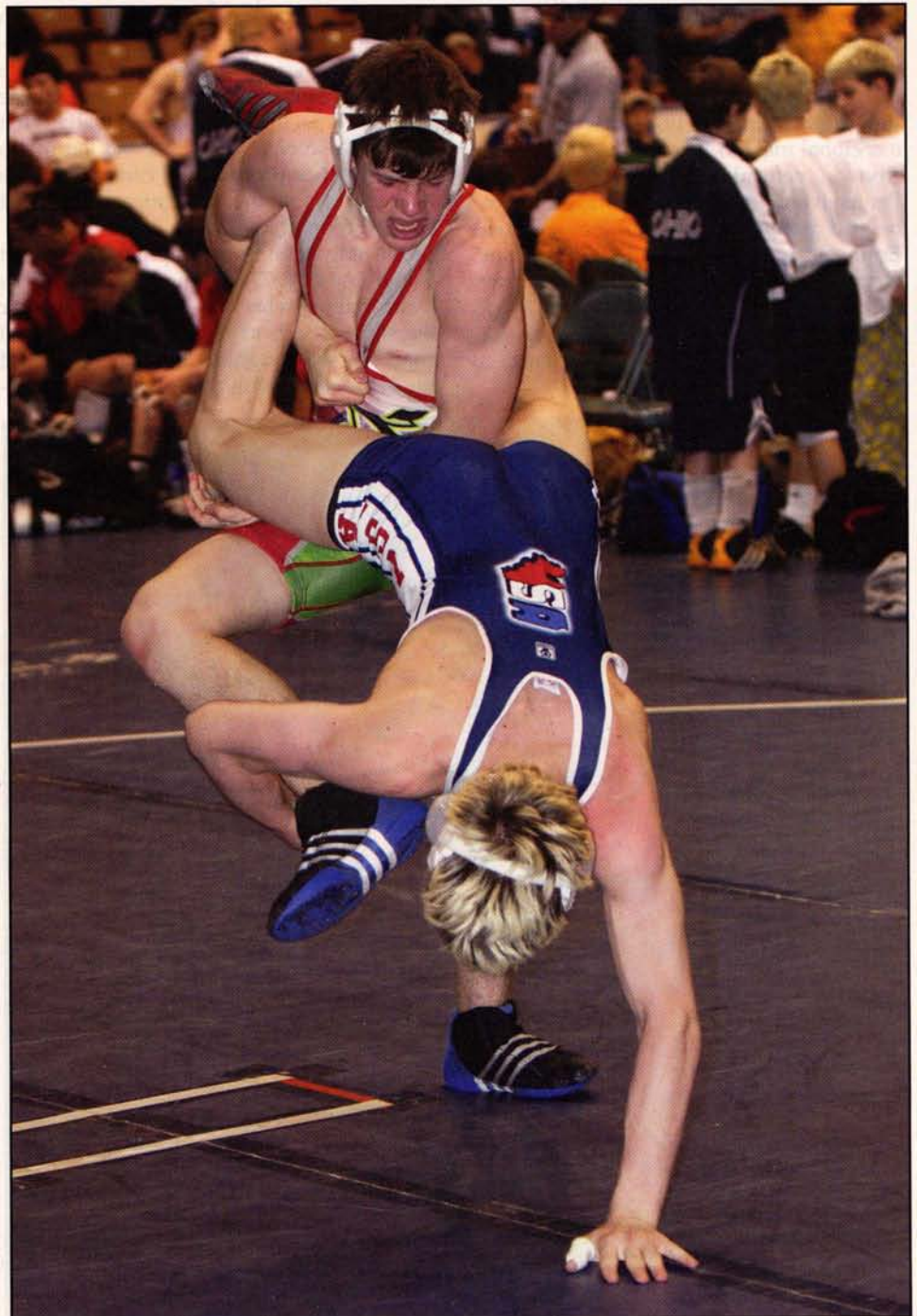
There is also a national meet. In 1966, Carle Place High School (NY) won the first of its five consecutive national championships. During those five years, the individual champion was also from that school. In fact, Carle Place High School had the top

three scorers in the national meets in 1966, 1968 and 1969.

For more than a decade, the national meet has been hosted and supported by the Marine Corps Recruit Depot San Diego. The 2006 National High School Physical Fitness Championships were held on May 19-20, 2006. Cardoza High School (NY) won the team competition for boys with a score of 2,341 (out of 2,500); Bethpage High School (NY) won the team competition for girls with a score of 1,666 (out of 2,500). Mikael Sloan of Cardoza High School won the boys individual title with 486 points (out of 500); Rachel Dilla of Penn Hills High School (PA) won the girls individual title with 374 points (out of 500).

For those who are curious, Carle Place High School (NY) set the team record for boys in 1967 with 2,448 points (out of 2,500); Parkland High School (PA) set the team record for girls in 1984 with 1,891 points (out of 2,500). Scott Graham of Emmaus High School (PA) set the individual record for boys in 1984 with 498 points (out of 500); Leslie McDade of Penn Hills High School (PA) set the individual record for girls in 1984 with 418 (out of 500).

USA Wrestling 2006 National Middle School Duals 140 lbs - Sam Bennett (Indiana Blue) decisioned Tanner Sturgeon (Nebraska Red), 5-4. Bennet went undefeated, earning tournament All-American honors. Photo by Chuck Bennett.

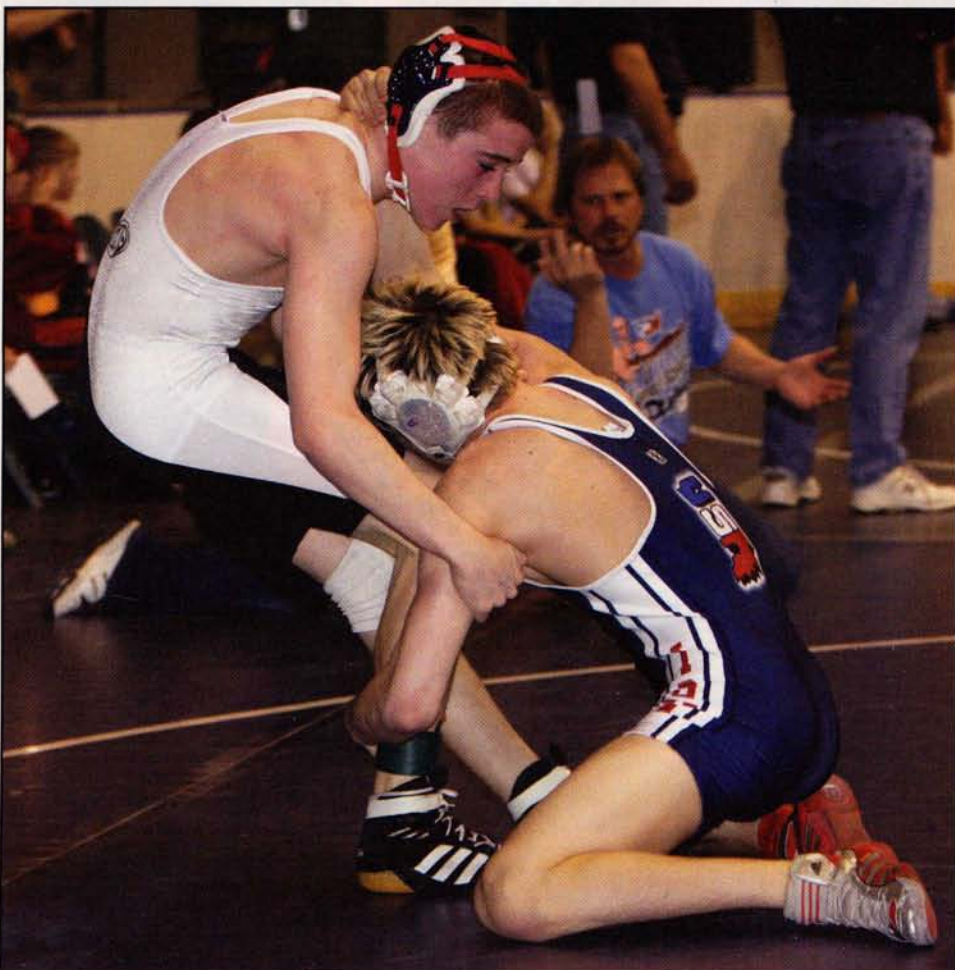


MY EXPERIENCE

The first time that I recall doing the YPF Program was in physical education ("gym class") during 1971-72, my freshman year at Coughlin High School in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania. Even though this was more than 35 years ago, I still remember like it was yesterday. When I initially participated in the program, I weighed 99 pounds. And at a height of 5'9", it was not a picture of fitness. I do not remember my performances in all events the first time that I took the test but three events are etched permanently on my memory disc: I did exactly 16 sit-ups in two minutes, 7 push-ups and zero pull-ups. Those dismal performances motivated me to work on those events with a burning desire to improve my fitness.

Coughlin had a Physical Fitness Team that was coached by Bob Corba, one of our physical-education teachers. In my junior year - two years after beginning the quest to improve my fitness - I earned a spot on the team. In April of 1974, we competed in a regional meet in Hershey against schools from central and northeastern Pennsylvania. We placed third in the meet behind perennial national powerhouses Emmaus and Parkland and I had the third-

USA Wrestling 2006 Middle School Duals 140 lbs. - Sam Bennett (Indiana Blue) defeated Sean Downs (Illinois Copper) by fall. Photo by Chuck Bennett.



best score on our team. One of my teammates, Mike Migatulski, was the individual champion with a score of 440. The next April, our team finished second in the region to Emmaus (which won the national championship the following year.) Tom Mitchell led our team with a score of 422 which placed him fourth in the region. Bill Micikas and I each scored 394 which tied us for second best on our team and 10th in the region. My performance included 100 sit-ups in two minutes, 60 push-ups and 18 pull-ups. In my training, I actually got to the point where I could do 110 sit-ups in two minutes and 80 consecutive push-ups but the YPF does not give extra points for going beyond the maximum so I stopped at 100 sit-ups and 60 push-ups in the meet.

To say that my experience in the YPF Program was wonderful would be an understatement. For one thing, participating in the program taught me dedication to duty, determination to achieve and desire to excel. Plus, the experience is really what fueled my interest in fitness and led me to pursue it as a professional career. There is no question that the YPF Program changed the direction of my life.

One side note: In my sophomore year at Coughlin (1972-73), my health teacher was Dana Balum who was also the first-year wrestling coach at the school. He is still coaching at Coughlin, having completed his 34th season with a career record of 446-

187-2 which puts him at number seven on the alltime wins list in Pennsylvania. Considering that Coughlin has had 559 wins in its history, he is credited with nearly 80% of those victories! Coach Balum is also the uncle of Kellon Balum who capped a perfect 50-0 season by winning the 2006 Pennsylvania Inter-scholastic Athletic Association Championship (AA) at 135 pounds for Line Mountain High School. (Kellon will wrestle at the collegiate level for the University of Virginia.) Finally, one of Coach Balum's assistants is Darren Keen who wrestled for Coughlin in the 1970s and was also a member of the Physical Fitness Team.

GETTING STARTED

The YPF Program is recognized and endorsed by the President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports. It is made available to every school and youth organization in the country, encompassing students from kindergarten through high school.

The program can be used as part of the regular physical-education curriculum. It is designed to augment - not replace - the existing curriculum and to be implemented easily. Physical educators can measure the fitness levels of their students in the five events that were mentioned previously or use modified events (such as a flexed-arm hang instead of pullups). In particular, coaches will find the YPF Program invaluable for keeping - or getting - their athletes in good condition while continuing the flow of their competitive juices.

Each year, the U. S. Marines Youth Foundation sends out several thousand certificates to schools free of charge. Two types of certificates are available: a Certificate of Athletic Accomplishment (for students who meet a minimum score) or a Certificate of Participation (for students who simply participate). Students can earn up to 17 certificates, one for each school year in which they are involved.

For 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." There, you can download the most recent National Youth Physical Fitness Program (seventh edition). You can also call the organization at 703-207-9690 or 888-USMC-FIT (888-876-2348). OO-RAH!

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).