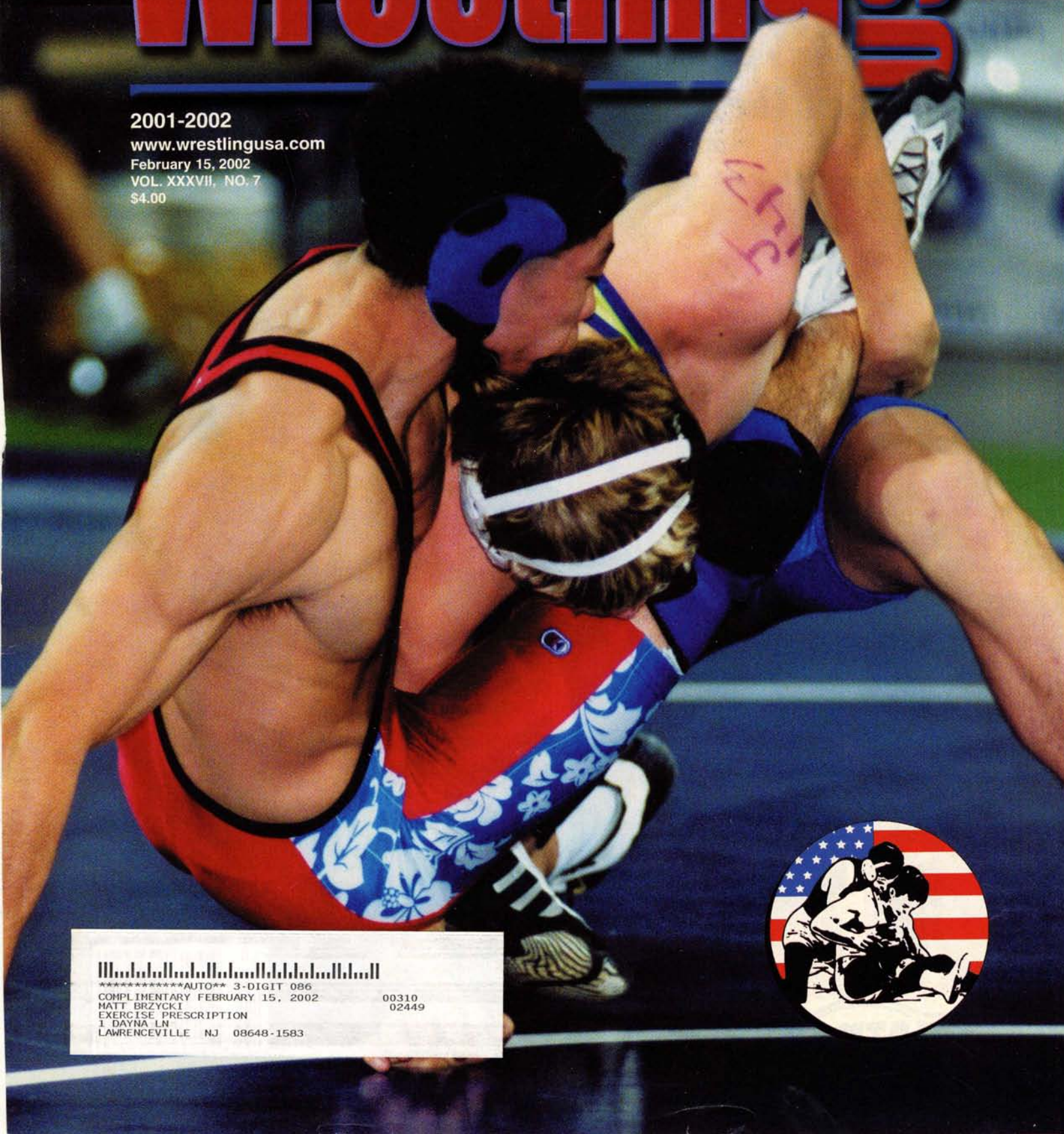


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Pre and Post Activity Foods/Fuels

By Matt Brzycki

Proper nutrition has an important role in your ability to perform at maximal levels and to expedite your recovery. Clearly, your ability to fully recuperate after an exhaustive activity directly affects your future performance and intensity in your training. Knowing what foods/fluids to consume before and after vigorous activity is truly helpful in optimizing your performance.

PRE-ACTIVITY FOODS/FUELS

A meal consumed prior to an activity — that is, a wrestling match or training session — should accomplish several things such as removing your hunger pangs, readying your body with fuel for the upcoming activity and relaxing your psychological state. There's no food that you can consume before an activity that will directly improve your performance. But there are certain foods that you can consume before an activity that can impair your performance and, for that reason, should be avoided. For example, fats and meats are digested slowly and, therefore, shouldn't be eaten prior to competing or training. Other foods to omit include those that are greasy, highly seasoned and flatulent (gas-forming) along with any specific

foods that you may personally find distressful to your digestive system. If anything, the choices for your pre-activity meal should be almost bland, yet appetizing enough so that you want to eat it.

Prior to an activity, you should also avoid eating foods that cause a sharp increase in your levels of blood glucose. Here's why: In response to highly elevated blood-glucose levels, your body increases its blood-insulin levels to maintain a stable internal environment (known as "homeostasis"). As a result of this biochemical balancing, your blood glucose is sharply reduced. This leads to hypoglycemia (or "low blood sugar") which decreases the availability of blood glucose as a fuel and causes you to feel severely fatigued. Although this condition is usually temporary, it remains an important consideration.

The idea, then, is to consume foods that elevate or maintain your blood glucose without triggering a dramatic response by blood insulin. At one time, it was thought that simple carbohydrates (sugars) increase blood glucose more rapidly than complex carbohydrates (starches). A more recent trend of thought has been to consider the Glycemic Index (GI) of a food. The GI dates back to 1981 when it was conceptualized by a group of scientists as a way to

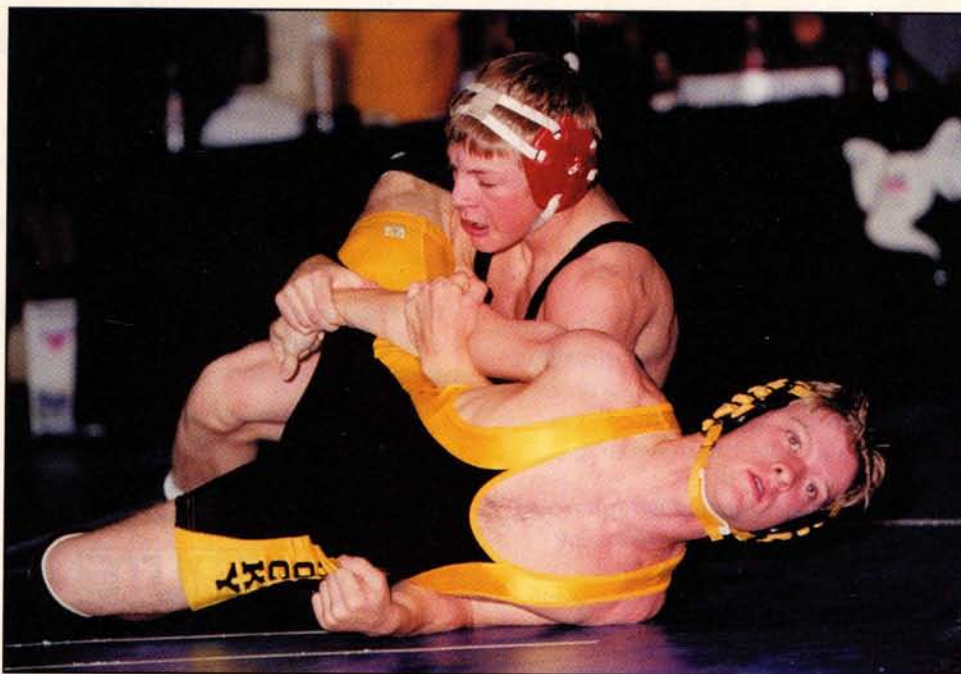
help determine which foods were best for people with diabetes. Essentially, the GI is a system of quantifying the carbohydrates in foods based upon how they affect blood glucose. A value is assigned to a food that correlates to the magnitude of the increase in blood glucose. For instance, a food with a GI of 25 means that it elevates blood glucose to a level that is 25% as great as consuming the same amount of pure glucose. Incidentally, the GI isn't related to portion size. So the GI is the same whether you consume 10 grams of a particular food or 110 grams. (The number of calories, of course, would differ according to the size of the portion.)

Before an activity, it's best to consume foods that are easy to digest and high in carbohydrates — specifically, those with a low GI. These foods help to keep your blood-glucose levels within a desirable range.

It's important not to simply assume that a sugary food raises blood glucose more than a starchy food. Indeed, honey (58) has a lower GI than a bagel (78) and, given these two options, honey would be a better choice for a pre-activity food. Foods with a relatively low GI include roasted peanuts (14), cherries (22), pure fructose (23), grapefruit (25), milk (34), pears (36), plain pizza (36), apples (38), apple juice (40), spaghetti (40), oranges (43), grapes (43), macaroni (46), oatmeal (55) and orange juice (55).

Water is perhaps the best liquid for you to drink before competing or training. Your fluid intake should be enough to guarantee optimal hydration during the activity.

The timing of your pre-activity meal is crucial to ensure that your digestive process doesn't impair your performance. Ideally, you should eat at least three hours prior to your activity. Obviously, you can control the timing of your meal such that it's not within three hours of a training session. Considering that the current rules for



2001 Rocky Mountain Monster match, 18 and under 135 lb. Here is the set up and the back points. Cater Downing of Wyoming works for a fall over Creighton Deaetwiler in one of many matches that did not get to the second period for the eventual 135 lb. champion. Photo by Dean Vandenberg.

making weight require you to weigh in within this three-hour window of time, planning a meal prior to a wrestling match presents a greater challenge. With careful and disciplined preparation, however, you can effectively schedule the timing of your meal before a wrestling match. Michael New, the Head Wrestling Coach at Princeton University, offers this insight: "The best way to have fuel in your tank for your match is to be under the limit of your weight class several hours before weigh-ins. That way, you can eat some foods with a low GI and still make weight. And by the time that your match rolls around, you'll be ready to wrestle. It all boils down to your mental discipline and planning."

In short, your pre-activity meal should be consumed more than three hours before training or competing and include foods that are familiar to you and are well tolerated — preferably carbohydrates with a low GI.

POST-ACTIVITY FOODS/FLUIDS

After an intense activity, proper nutrition accelerates your recovery and better prepares you for your next physical challenge. The idea is to replenish your depleted

glycogen stores and to expedite your recovery process as soon as possible after a wrestling match or training session.

Following an activity, it's best to consume foods that are high in carbohydrates — specifically, those with a high GI. These foods will help to restore your muscle glycogen in the quickest fashion. Foods with a relatively high GI include bananas (60), table sugar (65), watermelon (72), waffles (76), rice cakes (77), Rice Krispies® (82), pretzels (83), corn flakes (84), white rice (88), baked potatoes (93), white bread (95), glucose (100) and buckwheat pancakes (103).

Because your appetite is suppressed immediately after intense efforts, it may be more practical for you to initially consume fluids rather than solid food or a meal. Cold fluids also help to cool off your body. Commercial sports drinks can be excellent post-activity fluids. In terms of recovery, there are two important components of a sports drink: carbohydrates and electrolytes (sodium and potassium). All sports drinks are different, so you should read the nutrition labels to be sure of their exact contents. As an example, 12 ounces of Gatorade® Energy Drink (The Gatorade Company) has 78 grams of carbohydrates which provide 312 calories; the same

amount of Gatorade® Thirst Quencher contains 21 grams of carbohydrates which provide 84 calories. Both products have adequate amounts of electrolytes and a high GI but vastly different levels of carbohydrates and calories.

According to Nancy Clark, M. S., R. D. — an internationally known sports nutritionist and author — you should consume 0.5 grams of carbohydrates per pound of your body weight (g/lb) within two hours of completing an intense activity. This should be repeated again within the next two hours. For instance, an individual who weighs 150 pounds needs to ingest about 75 grams of carbohydrates — or 300 calories of carbohydrates — within two hours after an intense activity and another 75 grams of carbohydrates during the next two hours [0.5 g/lb x 150 lb = 75 g].

Matt Brzycki has been involved in the strength and conditioning of collegiate wrestlers for more than 20 years. Since 1986, he has authored nearly 60 articles for Wrestling USA Magazine. He is also the author of three books - including A Practical Approach to Strength Training - and the editor of Maximize Your Training, a 455-page book that features chapters written by more than 30 strength and fitness professionals.

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