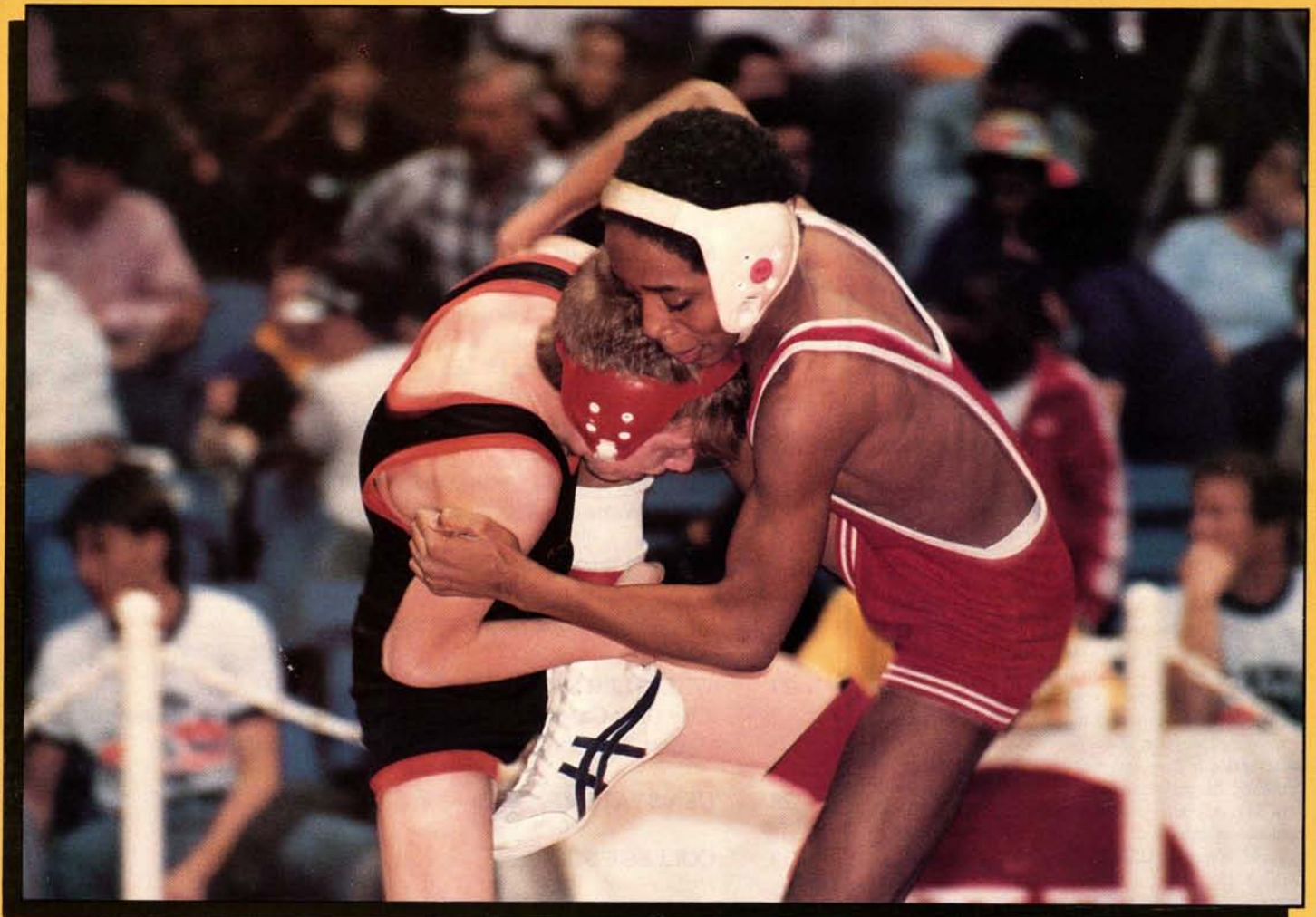




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# WRESTLING USA



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Are Warm Up Sets Necessary?  
Don't Apologize For Trying To Win.



**BY MATT BRZYCKI**  
Assistant Strength Coach  
Rutgers University

# COACHING TIPS

*What about Warm-Up Sets?  
Are these in Fact A Waste of Time?*

## Are Warm-Up Sets Necessary?

### QUESTION:

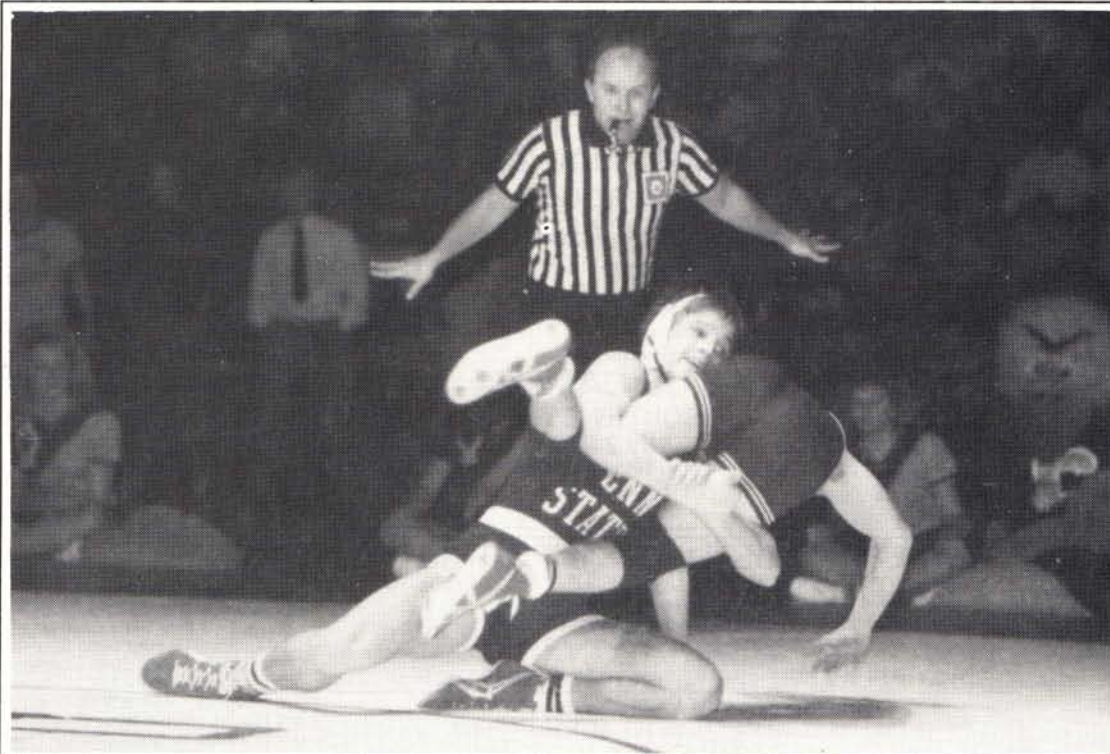
"Most strength programs are based upon the multiple-set approach to a given exercise and include 'warm-up' sets at 50% - 60% of maximum. Would it be more efficient with a simpler program of single sets over a wide range of exercises? What about 'warm-up' sets? are these in fact a waste of time?"

-Jim Fenion  
Head Wrestling Coach  
Leavenworth, Kansas

### ANSWER:

In the process of answering your question, let me explain a little bit about the strength training profession. Most strength coaches, myself included, are former competitive weightlifters. Unfortunately, in most cases they have elected to train their athletes in the same manner that they themselves trained. Additionally, many strength coaches are often influenced by the latest "research" that comes out of the Eastern Bloc countries, since they traditionally have the best weightlifters in the world. In effect, there are large numbers of athletes training like competitive lifters performing endless sets of each exercise. However, athletes need not and should not train like weightlifters for at least four reasons:

(1) Several of the movements that are typically associated with these programs (e.g. the power clean and the snatch) are extremely complex motor skills. Like any other motor skill, it takes a lot of time to master the specific neuromuscular patterns. This valuable time could be used elsewhere - such as perfecting wrestling techniques. In short, most athletes are



Penn State's Jim Martin (126) decided Jim Best, North Carolina State 17-4 in semi-finals at Mat Town. Martin won the title.  
Photo by Marshall Goldstein  
State College, PA

spending needless time and energy learning competitive lifting skills.

Additionally, motor learning research tells us that there is absolutely no carry over between competitive lifting skills and athletic skills. The Principle of Specificity is well documented in the literature. Briefly, it states that your activities or practices must be specific to the task or skill in order for maximal improvement to occur. Specific means exact - not similar, but exact. So, how can a power clean, for example, be touted as specific to such a wide range of skills from the breast stroke to the shot put to the golf swing? Obviously, it can't. The best way to improve a particular motor skill is to practice that motor skill for thousands and thousands of repetitions.

(2) Although "multiple-set" strength programs can be productive, they are extremely inefficient in terms of time. I've read prescriptions for countless routines that ask their athletes to perform over 50 sets per workout 6 times per week! That's ridiculous. I also find it hard to believe that an entire team has the time to train in this fashion. Imagine how long it would take! And, if your program doesn't address all of your athletes, then your program is somewhat less than successful.

In addition, most of the sets are essentially worthless because they're submaximal. If an athlete's max bench press is 200 pounds, of what possible use is a set with 50% of that (100 pounds)? Warm-up sets are necessary -

but only for competitive weightlifters. During their training, they need those sets to practice the specific motor patterns for their sport; during a max attempt, they also require warm-up sets to reduce their risk of sustaining an injury. They'll also obtain a better response from "warm" muscles. However, wrestlers don't have to train like this. They'll get similar results by doing one maximal set to the point of momentary muscular failure for a prescribed number of reps. And, if they perform a high number of repetitions (generally 6 -12 for the upper body and 10-15 for the lower body) their muscles will warm-up as they do the set. Similar results - but in a fraction of the time.

(3) Going for a one repetition maximum or low repetition movements (less than about 3 reps) increases the likelihood of injury. Not only that, but there's absolutely no correlation between how much someone lifts and his ability to wrestle or play football or do anything else. If there was a correlation, I'm sure we would see more native Bulgarians and Rumanians in the NFL since they're

among the best weightlifters on the planet. So, until the rules are changed to use a wrestler's max bench press as a tie-breaking criteria, don't emphasize how much one of your athletes can lift for one rep.

(4) Several of the exercises used by competitive lifters are inherently dangerous. For example, barbell squats compress the spinal column and place much stress on the knee joint. Exercises are also very dangerous if done explosively. Again, not a shred of evidence exists to suggest that lifting explosively will make your wrestlers more explosive.

Unfortunately, that's what is occurring out there in most strength programs. Some schools even go so far as to hold a "Meet Day" in which their athletes go for their maximum attempts. Sounds like a weightlifting meet to me. At least one school has an area cornered off that no one can use unless they can bench press and squat a certain amount of weight. I suppose it's some sort of hallowed ground or something. Hey, are we training aspiring weightlifters or wrestlers? I bet there's hundreds of high schools out there force-feeding periodization (or something similar) to their athletes. Can you imagine how confusing microcycles, mesocycles, macrocycles, hypertrophy

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phases and other aspects must be to a 16 or 17 year old? Sadly, most schools use a certain strength program simply because a successful university or pro team uses it. But, how can two schools or teams be so successful despite using very different strength programs? It's because they both have great athletes.

To sum it up, a strength program need not be a marathon session of endless "warm-up" sets; it's much more efficient and far less complicated to utilize a single set system of maximal intensity which addresses all of the body's major muscle groups. The successful strength program is safe, efficient and productive while meeting the needs of your entire squad.

Editor's Note: Mr. Brzycki will have a regular column in Wrestling U.S.A. You may submit questions concerning strength training. Send your questions to Matt Brzycki, Assistant Strength Coach, Rutgers-The State University of New Jersey, Division of Intercollegiate Athletics CN 5061 New Brunswick, New Jersey 08903

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