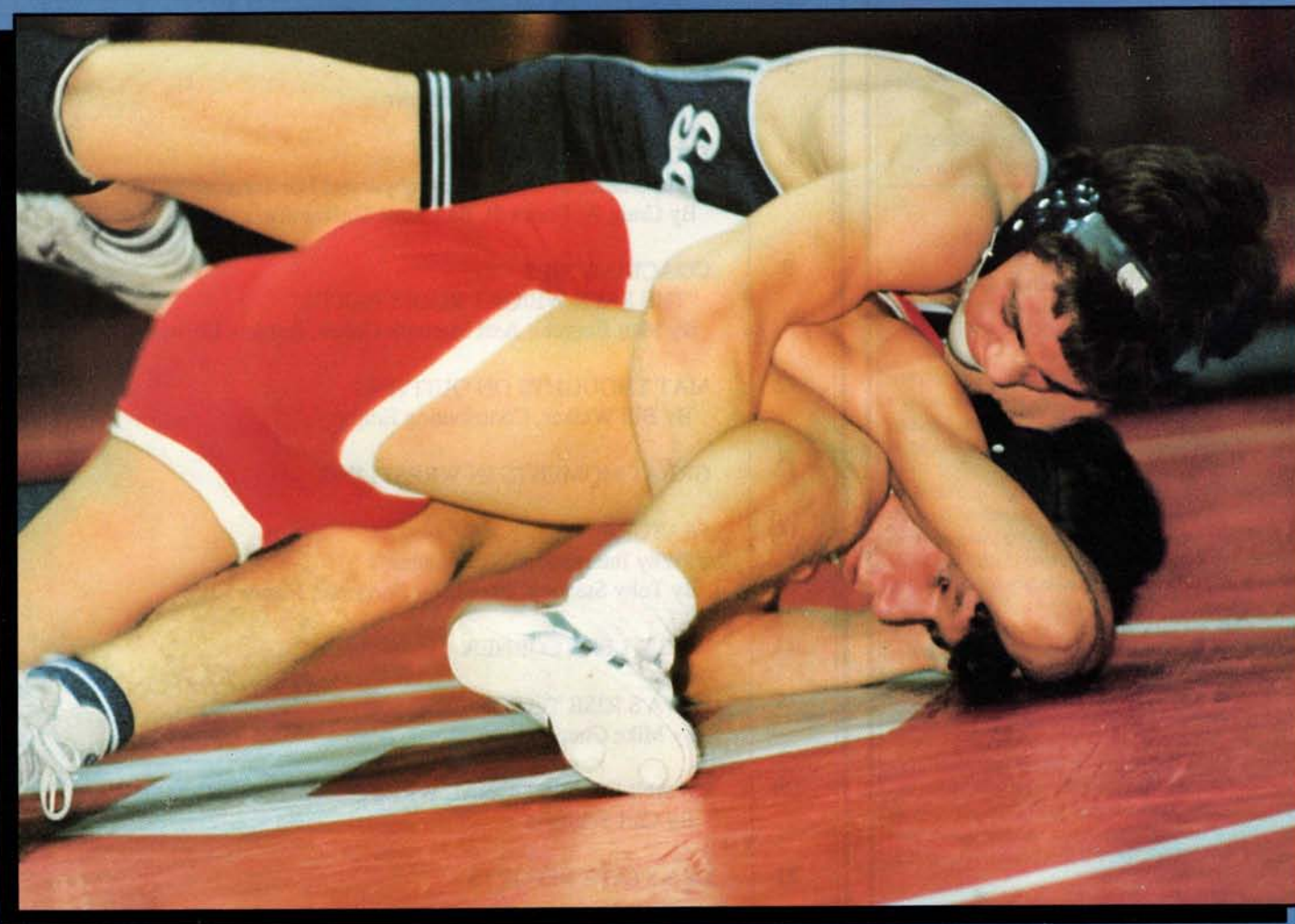




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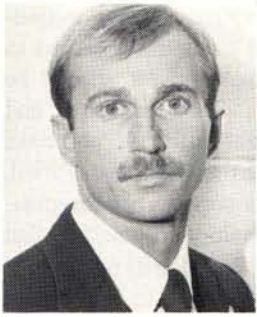
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Iowa's Rise To Power
The Safe Weight Room



By Matt Brzycki
Asst. Strength Coach
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COACHING TIPS

Coaching Tips is a regular feature of Wrestling USA. It's an opportunity for coaches, trainers, athletes, educators to share some helpful information with readers across the country. Tips, techniques, insights, special training, conditioning and equipment are all good meat for Coaching Tips. Let us know if you have a good idea. Send your articles to Wrestling USA today.

*Safety in the weight room extends far beyond
the scope of spotters and collars.*

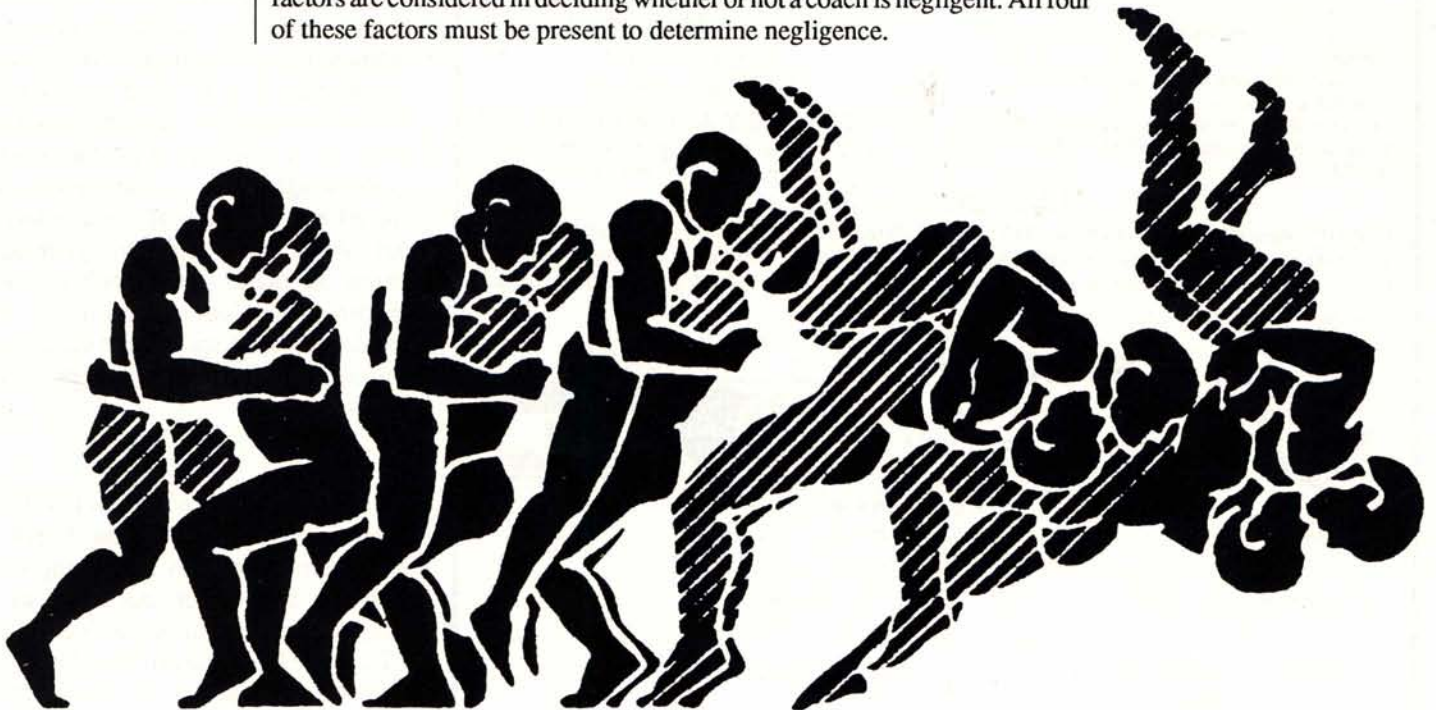
THE SAFE WEIGHT ROOM - Part 1

Strength training, like any other sport or activity, contains the potential for injury. Safety in the weight room, however, extends far beyond the scope of spotters and collars. Indeed, a safe program may be a coach's only defense against a lawsuit.

At Rutgers - The State University of New Jersey, we have 32 varsity sports programs. Our Strength Staff consists of four coaches who are responsible for the strength training of more than 1,000 varsity athletes. Throughout the school year, one or more of our strength coaches is assigned specifically to a priority sport such as wrestling. However, at most high schools and even some colleges, the strength training of athletes is supervised by one of the team's coaches since a professionally trained strength coach isn't on the staff. Sometimes, a coach suddenly finds himself supervising an area of high liability with little or no background in the safe operation of a weight room. Therefore, the intent of this article is to provide coaches with a basic understanding of their legal responsibilities in the weight room.

NEGLIGENCE

In simple terms, negligence is when a coach fails to act as a reasonable and prudent coach would act in a similar situation. If you are sued and brought to trial, a judge or jury determines the appropriateness of your actions. Four factors are considered in deciding whether or not a coach is negligent. All four of these factors must be present to determine negligence.



The first factor is that there must be the presence of a duty. As coaches, we have a number of legal duties. (These duties will be explained shortly.) Secondly, one of the duties must have been violated. A third factor is whether your breach of duty was responsible for an athlete's injuries. Finally, the damages or injuries are considered.

Again, all four of these factors must be proven before you can be found negligent. You will not be found negligent if any of these factors are absent.

LEGAL DUTIES

As coaches, we have certain legal obligations to our athletes which must be performed reasonably and prudently. According to the law, we are expected to provide several major duties for our athletes. These duties involve three main areas of responsi-

bility - supervision, environment and the selection and conduct of activities.

SUPERVISION

First, we must provide adequate supervision. Supervision is one of our most important responsibilities since it includes all of our legal duties.

To begin with, you should be qualified to supervise a weight room. Just because you have 18 inch arms or a 400 pound bench press doesn't automatically mean that you are a qualified supervisor. There are various certifications in strength training, but a few of these programs test you on their particular approach (which is often biased and sometimes dangerous). For example, one national certification test includes questions on the latest Eastern European training methodology. Unfortunately, most of you are coach-

ing wrestlers not aspiring Soviet weightlifters! So, you don't necessarily need to possess certification, but you should be mature, competent, knowledgeable and understand your legal duties. If you have assistants, make sure they too are qualified.

In performing your supervisory responsibilities, you must position yourself so that you can see and hear as much as possible. If you're the only supervisor in the weight room, try not to focus all of your attention on one athlete. Likewise, you can't supervise properly if you're lifting while your wrestlers are lifting. Don't coach from behind your desk either - get out on the floor with your athletes.

Obviously, you can't supervise if you aren't there! If one of your wrestlers gets hurt while you're gone, you could be found negligent if it was determined that your absence contributed to the injury. In short, you're asking for a lot of trouble by leaving your athletes unattended in the weight room.

PROVIDING A SAFE ENVIRONMENT

It is your legal duty to provide and maintain a safe weight room with good equipment in proper condition. You are responsible for eliminating any hazardous conditions or informing your supervisor of the situation in writing. You are also responsible for noticing what a reasonable and a prudent coach should have noticed, whether you did or not.

A safe weight room starts with safe equipment. Insist that your Athletic Department purchase the best equipment that its budget allows. Inspect the equipment regularly and thoroughly (especially any moving parts) to ensure that it is in good working order. Defective equipment should be replaced or removed. You should place the equipment in the weight room so that there's enough space for your athletes to move around without getting hurt. Insist that your athletes return all plates and dumbbells to their proper places. Your athletes should also be required to use a spotter and collars during any overhead lifts (e.g., bench press, shoulder press, etc.)

EDITORS 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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