

Why should I let my child wrestle.

Wrestling is perhaps the purest form of athletic competition to exist in the realm of organized sports. There are no bats or balls, or pucks or sticks. No pads or helmets or jerseys. There's no time to rethink strategy, regroup, or even to catch your breath. There's only you, and your opponent of equal weight and size. Experience, preparation and the will to succeed will determine the victor.

There's no doubt about it, wrestling tops the list of intense, highly-competitive sports. Wrestling involves a unique balance of practically every aspect of physical and psychological conditioning. Strength is as important as stamina. Speed as technique, strategy as intensity, and power as is coordination.

However, it's not always the natural athlete that ultimately succeeds in the sport - it's the natural competitor. Kids that are strong for their weight, well coordinated and naturally aggressive are usually more successful early on in the sport. However, it's the highly competitive kids that really enjoy the sport, that eventually achieve the highest levels of success. True competitors come in all shapes and sizes, and in varying degrees of natural talent. Many of the best wrestlers the world has ever seen, such as John Smith, Dan Gable and Dave Schultz were not star athletes. They are and were ordinary people with an extraordinary competitive drive.

Although it is wise for parents and coaches to de-emphasize winning, victories can be extremely gratifying because of the strong sense of personal accomplishment. The effort put forth in practice and preparation is apparent in competition, and not lost in a team effort. This aspect of wrestling can be a great motivator and can develop a person's work ethic, self-confidence, and ability to achieve in all areas of life. Wrestling is great for exposing the "champion" within most any kid, but especially with those that love to compete.

How does wrestling compare with team sports such as soccer, baseball and basketball? Wrestling is considered an individual sport, but includes many of the benefits of team sports. Wrestling differs from most team sports in that during competition, athletes must rely entirely on their own individual abilities for success. Those that dedicate the time and effort will eventually achieve at a level directly proportionate to the investment they have made - even if their teammates prepare and perform at a different level. Wrestlers also develop an appreciation and respect for teammates that have been through the same challenges, and a strong sense of belonging and camaraderie with teammates and other wrestlers.

What physical effects can the sport of wrestling have on children? Sports offer opportunities for children to improve their strength, flexibility and coordination, while having fun. Most sports activities rely more on some muscle groups and less on others. For example, most sports focus primarily on pushing motions (leg/arm extension) such as throwing, hitting, kicking, jumping and running. Experts believe that unilateral (equal emphasis on all muscle groups) physical development is especially important in young athletes. Isolated development at an early age, over a long period, increases the risk of injury and limits long-term foundational growth. Swimming, gymnastics and wrestling are among the few sports that engage both pulling and pushing muscle groups. Of all the sports choices a parent and child can make, wrestling is perhaps the best sport for overall physical development because it involves all muscle groups, and requires the greatest balance of athletic skill. In other words, wrestling does more to improve basic things such as strength, balance, speed, agility and intensity, and is not as specialized as most other common sports.

Does wrestling teach or promote aggressive or violent behavior? Aggressiveness ? Yes. Violence ? No. Wrestling is often referred to as the toughest sport, and in many ways it is, but it is certainly not violent, nor does it lead to unruly or destructive behavior.

One of the factors that make wrestling so different from most other sports is that wrestling involves head-to-head competition. Each wrestler's efforts work in direct opposite from each other as in a tug-of-war contest. Success in wrestling requires the ability to attack, as well as the ability to stop your opponent's attack. The same factors apply with boxing and martial arts, but an attack in wrestling is nonviolent. Wrestling does not permit opponents to strike one another, and imposes strict penalties or disqualification for violent behavior. In essence, wrestling is unique in the fact that it can be very aggressive without being violent. The objective is not to destroy or harm one's opponent, but to out-manuever them and to gain control.

The intensity, with which wrestlers compete, increases with age and experience. Kids wrestling, especially the younger age groups, is not nearly as intense as high school or college wrestling. It's common for new wrestlers to feel somewhat intimidated at first, not knowing how they compare with other wrestlers, but that is soon overcome. Wrestling, perhaps more than any other sport, is a great for building confidence while retaining a healthy dose of humility. The long-term result is that it develops the champion from within, and leads to greater success both on and off the mat, and does not turn kids into bullies or thugs.

Can wrestling have an effect on character development? Success factors in sports, or anything for that matter, are part God-given (i.e. height and size) and part acquired (i.e. endurance). Success in wrestling depends most on acquired factors, and unlike most other sports, wrestling does not favor athletes of any particular height, size, weight, muscle type, race or social class, and does not rely on superior vision or hearing. Wrestlers learn, by the nature of the sport, that long-term success has much more to do with the investment made than the "natural" gifts one is given. Wrestlers learn the value of preparation and hard work, and the role it plays in achieving one's goals, should you let your child wrestle.