

Accept the Challenge...Promote our Special Sport!

by Peggy Durant in collaboration with Ken Chertow

1. Educate everyone who will listen about the unique aspects of the sport. Serious wrestlers and those close to them have no trouble seeing the positive impact of wrestling on their lives. We need to help those who are deciding to enter their children in our programs, newcomers trying out the sport, as well as to have those outside the sport, understand the values that are learned and the character that wrestling develops. To name a few of the values which benefit wrestlers (and society) the rest of their lives we might start with determination, persistence, perseverance, goal-setting, mental and physical toughness, humility in victory, grace in defeat, confidence, willingness to risk, etc..
2. Develop a good relationship with the local sportswriters and make sure they are invited to all special events. If newspaper coverage is poor in your area, write your own articles and submit them to the newspaper or other local publications to draw attention to the achievements and efforts of the wrestling program. Email radio, TV, and newspaper media and inform them of events or achievements of note. If a sportswriter, or media outlet provides good coverage of a wrestling event, send off a complimentary note or email and thereby encourage them to do more. Lobby for more TV coverage of local, regional, and national wrestling events and support by watching those that already exist.
3. Hold an elementary recognition night at one of the home dual meets in which elementary wrestlers are introduced prior to the start of the main event. More experienced, confident elementary wrestlers can be showcased in exhibition matches prior to the start of the JV or varsity meet. If possible, feature match-ups prearranged with the visiting team. To give the evening more impact, elementary wrestlers and their parents could be seated together in the gymnasium or special floor seating as honored guests. Watching the JV and varsity dual meets and the excitement they generate, virtually guarantees both the young wrestlers and their parents will begin to visualize themselves as part of the varsity team down the road. An event of this type provides much positive reinforcement to all youth wrestlers regardless of their current level of skill and can increase interest and motivation for staying with the program.
4. Make plans now to attend States with other parents, fans, and wrestlers from your area. If you have local wrestlers competing at states, they will appreciate having a section in the stands from home. If no wrestlers from your local schools qualify to compete at States, then beginning this year find the means to take the top returning wrestlers along with the coaches to States in order to expose them to what they might accomplish next season and beyond.
5. Hold post-season wrestling banquets and award nights for varsity, JV, and Jr Hi programs together, with recognition given to all wrestlers. Make sure each wrestler is recognized for their contribution to the team in addition to highlighting the accomplishments of the most outstanding wrestlers. Focus on the achievements of the past year and be liberal with praise for the coaches, wrestlerettes, cheerleaders, booster club members, parents, and fans who support the program. But just as important present a vision of what the program can be next season and beyond and the things that will need to happen in order to achieve those lofty goals for the team and individual wrestlers. Get everyone thinking about spring & summer training, competition, weight lifting, etc...
6. We need to develop life-long fans - not just parents who are involved only as long as their child is wrestling. Encourage parents of graduating seniors to stay active, assign them a job for the coming season if at all possible! They are valuable reservoirs of talent and experience. Attend as many wrestling events as possible on all levels - high school, college, and senior. Take a kid or two along to expose him or her to the sport. Filling seats is one way to show support and promote the sport and vote to keep wrestling a vibrant, valued, and healthy part of community life.

I hope these ideas spur those who love amateur wrestling to take action in 2005 to insure healthy continuous growth of this unique and special sport within our state and keep PA at the forefront of the

USA wrestling world. Ideas that require longer range planning but that have proven to boost participant and fan interest will be the focus of a future article.

Peggy Durant helped found and helps run the Power Plant Mat Club, Inc., a USA Wrestling affiliate club in Clearfield which provided off-season training for over 60 wrestlers from 9 area school districts this year. She is also active with the Clearfield Wrestling Booster Club as coordinator of alumni events. Peggy's son, Luke, is a long time Gold Medal Camper who is now in college at Wheaton College in Illinois.