

Psychology of Peak Performance for Wrestling:

Putting Your Mind in a Position to Think Confidently and Compete Well

Dave Yukelson, Ph.D., Sport Psychologist, Penn State University

1. Motivation and Commitment to Meaningful Goals

- Personal meaning and incentives (*why do you wrestle?, what drives you to reach your goals?*)
- Positive visions and perspectives (*what kind of vision do you have as a competitive wrestler?*)
- Passion, pride, self-motivation (*pursue your own goals/dreams, challenge self to raise the bar*)
- Think like a champion (*expect to do well, believe in yourself, enjoy the pursuit of excellence*)
- Quality training and purposeful intentions/actions (*come to practice w/intent on getting better*)

2. Goal Setting: Create a road map for success (specific action plans for training and competition)

- Challenge yourself to work on areas that need improvement
- Goals should be challenging, measurable, self-referenced, and process oriented
- Technical goals (top, bottom, feet), tactical goals (positioning, set up/shooting, take downs), mental goals (preparation and focus, intensity and mental toughness throughout the match), physical goals (strength and conditioning, weight control)
- Set short term goals (daily/weekly/monthly) in relation to long term objectives (season, career)
- Write your goals down and specify timetables for achievement ("I will develop three new moves from the bottom position by November 15th")
- Monitor, evaluate, and adjust your goals based on the progress you are making (adapt and persist)

3. Mental Preparation for Peak Performance

- Develop your own mental plans for competition (thoughts, emotions, attitude, intensity, focus)
- Olympic medalists have/adhere to very systematic plans and pre-performance routines
- Visualization training: Program your mind, muscles, and emotions for success
- Develop your imagination — make your imagery as vivid, realistic, and detailed as possible
- Develop the feel in your imaging ("Feelization")
- Imagine how you will achieve your goals (see/feel yourself wrestling/executing moves well)
- Focus on what you want to occur
- Attitude: carry yourself w/confidence, intensity, full focus, trust, always hustling, looking fresh
- On your feet — taking control (offense: head snapping, hand fighting, getting angle, shooting; defense: sprawling, getting hips down/legs back, blocking off, reattacking)
- On top (pressure forward, breaking opponent down, leg riding, etc.)
- On bottom (explosion, pressure back, getting to feet, etc.)
- Positive energizing cues help create vivid imaging ("quick and aggressive", "explode out")
- Mentally prepare yourself for coping with adversity and/or distractions

4. Mental Focusing: Concentration, Confidence, and Composure

- Mental and emotional readiness: Approaching competition with the proper mindset
- Connect with your competition goals (sense of being on a mission)
- Embrace the pressure (harness the high energy of competition and make it work for you)
- Control the controllables: Stay focused on you
- What do you need from yourself to wrestle with confidence, intensity, full focus, etc.
- Self-regulation skills (relaxation, emotion/energy management, positive self-talk)
- Relaxation and intensity go hand in hand ("you have to be relaxed in order to be explosive")

- Breathing: Your most versatile mental skill (clears tension and clears clutter in the mind)
- Thinking confidently and acting confidently (confidence comes in knowing you are prepared)
- TRUST your preparation and hard work will pay off, condition your mind to think confidently)
- Concentration, immersion, and "the zone" (connecting with your performance)
- Pre-performance routines to help click on the desired competitive attitude and focus
- Poise and emotional self-control: Keeping your cool while competing
- Refocusing: Let go of mistakes quickly and learn how to take it one take down at a time
- Don't allow frustration to undermine your confidence or focus (be persistent & mentally tough)

5. Evaluate the Journey

- Always Positive Lessons