**Introduction to Wrestling**

Wrestling is very different from many sports your child has already participated in.  It can be very overwhelming at first.  From scoring, to the difference between meets and tournaments, to the way your child is matched up with other wrestlers, there is a lot to learn in your wrestler’s first year.  This page was designed to help you understand the sport of wrestling and answer many common questions first year parents have.  As club parents, these are all things we learned on our own, and hopefully it will help you through your first season.

**Best Advice: ASK, ASK, And ASK!**

Do not be shy; wrestling is not an easy sport to figure out.  We have a very friendly group of knowledgeable coaches and parents in our club, and NO ONE will think less of you for asking many questions.  With everything involved, there really is no dumb question.  No one expects you to go to the first practice, meet, or tournament and be a wrestling expert after reading this guide.  Please, please, please ask people questions, you will learn more from that than anything else!

Besides learning, asking questions will make you familiar with the coaches and parents in the club, in turn making the club more closely knit.  Before you know it, you will know all the parents in the club and be cheering for their children on the mat at meets and tournaments.  As a parent, I can say one of the greatest aspects of wrestling is how close everyone in the club is, from the wrestlers, to the coaches to the parents.  The bonds you form in wrestling are unlike those in any other sport.

**Attire**

At practice, wrestlers wear shorts, a t-shirt and wrestling shoes.  We also recommend getting head gear to protect your child’s ears. The head gear is required at all Keystone matches and most tournaments  At meets and tournaments, your wrestler will be required to wear wrestling shoes, head gear and a singlet.  The club will provide your singlet, and it must be returned at the end of the season.  **The singlet is required to be the same as the team at any Keystone match.**

**Practice**

Practice will always be indoors on wrestling mats, which are cleaned on a regular basis.  Practices consist of warm ups, conditioning, instruction and occasionally, games (which are actually “conditioning in disguise”).  You will probably notice right at the first practice there is a lot more conditioning, specifically running, than most other youth sports.  This is because wrestling is an extremely taxing sport physically.  In competition at this level, bouts consist of three one-minute periods.  During these three minutes, your child will exert every ounce of energy they have, and they will usually have several bouts in a day.  The better conditioned they are, the better a chance they have of lasting through (and hopefully winning) all their bouts. Because physical contact is a part of the sport, and several skin conditions are generally associated with contact sports, we highly recommend your wrestler **shower immediately after practice**, in addition to any competition.  As was already mentioned, our mats are cleaned on a regular basis, and coaches are always looking for possible skin conditions in our wrestlers (and opponents), but it’s best not to take chances and just get them in the shower right away when you get home.

**Tournaments**

These are generally individual competitions, but on occasion, we will attend tournaments as a club and have coaches available for your wrestler.  The club will send out notifications and post on the web site when we are attending a tournament as a team.  These are optional. You do not have to go to these. In any tournament, your wrestler will be assigned to a **bracket**, which is a grouping of wrestlers with similar weights and ages.  Most tournaments award trophies or medals to wrestlers who place first through fourth in their bracket.  Some Novice tournaments awards medals to all wrestlers in a bracket.  All tournaments require registration (online or mail-in), have a registration fee and charge an admission fee at the door.  This is because most tournaments are fundraisers for the club holding them.

**NOVICE TOURNAMENTS**- this is a special type of tournament where only first, second or third year wrestlers are allowed to enter.  As a first year parent, you will probably want to focus on this type of tournament.  The most common type of Novice tournament is first and second year experience only.  On occasion, there is a “True Novice” tournament where only first year wrestlers are allowed to enter and there are a few Novice Tournaments, which allow third year wrestlers to compete.  The Novice classification is based on **experience only**.  You can enter Novice tournaments at any age as long as you meet the experience requirements (in your first, second or third year depending on the tournament).  You are still grouped by age and weight, and generally, the older you get in Novice, the smaller your brackets will be.  The thing to remember about Novice is all clubs and organizations who run tournaments have different rules, so you will have to **read the registration form closely** to make sure your wrestler qualifies to enter.  Most Novice tournaments use an “Honor System” for weights, meaning you write your wrestler’s weight on the registration form, and they trust you to tell the truth.  However, if an opponent challenges your weight, and you don’t come within so many pounds of that weight (usually 2), you will be disqualified from the tournament, so it’s best to be honest (and that’s what’s best for your wrestler too, cheating will not make them better).

**OPEN TOURNAMENTS**- There are no restrictions on who may enter.  The competition in most Open tournaments is very tough and you will usually see many more entrants than in Novice.  Almost all Open tournaments require weigh-ins.  Some allow weigh-ins the morning of the tournament, but most require it 2-3 days in advance, so they can accurately create the brackets.  When you fill out the registration, you will put down your wrestler’s current weight.  When they weigh-in in advance, if they do not make that weight, they will usually allow you to change weight classes (sometimes for a small fee).  However, if you opt for the day of weigh-in and your wrestler does not make weight, typically the tournament will disqualify you.

**Types of Tournaments**

**Round-Robin Tournament**

Typically, your child will be in a 4, 5 or 6 wrestler bracket.  They will wrestle everyone in their bracket once.  Usually, the wrestler with no losses gets first place, one loss gets second place, two losses gets third place, three losses gets fourth place, etc.  Occasionally, the standings will not work out this cleanly, and wrestler A could beat wrestler B, wrestler B could beat wrestler C, and wrestler C could beat wrestler A.  When this happens, and wrestlers have matching records (in the above case, all wrestlers are 1-1), the standings are determined by a series of tiebreakers.  Tiebreakers are usually things like head-to-head, total points (pin is 2 points and major decision is 1 point), quickest pins, etc.  Tiebreakers usually vary by tournament.  It is very common in Round Robin to see the “**Madison Weight System**”.  Instead of grouping wrestlers into fixed weight size brackets (e.g. 55, 60, 65, 73, 84…), the tournament organizer will take all the weights in a division, order them from lowest to highest, then split out brackets based on how many wrestlers they want in each bracket.  For example, if there are wrestlers who weigh 45, 46, 48, 49, 50, 50, 51, and 52 lbs., and the tournament wants 4 man brackets, then 45, 46, 48 and 49 would be in Bracket A and 50, 50, 51 and 52 would be in Bracket B, and it would go on like that for all the wrestlers in each division.  There is usually an allowance on how far apart wrestler’s weights can be in a Madison bracket.  For example, in the scenario above, if wrestlers are only allowed to be 3 lbs. apart in any bracket, Bracket A would be 45, 46 and 48 (because 49 is 4 lbs. heavier than 45), Bracket B would be 49, 50, 50 and 51, and 52 would be bumped into Bracket C.  This is done to guarantee no wrestler will be going against somebody too big for them.  Because of this, no Madison Weight Bracket tournament will ever have a “perfect setup” where all brackets have the same number of wrestlers.

**Double Elimination Tournament**

Bracket sizes can range from 4 wrestlers all the way to 32; however, 8-16 is much more common.  In Double Elimination, there are essentially two brackets, Championship and Consolation.  Everyone starts in the Championship bracket, if they lose; they drop to the Consolation bracket.  If they lose in the Consolation bracket (which would be their second loss), they are eliminated from the tournament.   The championship bracket will culminate in the Championship match, where 1st and 2nd place are determined.  The consolation bracket culminates in the Consolation final, where 3rd and 4th place are determined.  On occasion, you may see a Double Elimination bracket where a wrestler can drop to the consolation bracket, but then fight their way back into championship bracket (however, this is not very common).  Double Elimination tournaments usually use a “fixed weight” system, meaning there are brackets for fixed weight classes like 55, 60, 65, 73, 84, etc.  In that example, if your wrestler weighs 63 lbs., they would be in the 65 lb. bracket.

**Tournament Age Groupings**

As mentioned previously, wrestlers are matched by **age** and weight in tournaments.  Tournaments generally have 4 age groupings at the youth level.  It is worth noting that these groupings or **divisions** are completely defined by the tournament director, so make sure to read the registration form closely, but the following is the most common setup you will see.

**Pee Wee -**Ages 6 and under

**Bantam** - Ages 7 and 8

**Midget** - Ages 9 and 10

**Junior** - Ages 11 and 12

**Scoring**

At first, you will have no idea how your child’s matches are being scored.  It is very confusing and somewhat overwhelming during your first year.  However, it is much simpler than it seems.  The main objective of wrestling is to pin your opponent.  In the process, you will get points for different things that you do.  If no one is pinned at the end of the bout, the wrestler with the most points wins.

There are three positions a wrestler can be in during a bout: **offensive, defensive or neutral**.  The offensive wrestler is in control and usually on top of the defensive wrestler.  The defensive wrestler is fighting to become the offensive wrestler by gaining control.  Neutral is when neither wrestler has control (no one is clearly offensive or defensive yet).  All bouts start with both wrestlers neutral.

**Ways to Score**

**Takedown** - **2** points - Scored when a wrestler gains control and becomes the offensive wrestler from the neutral stance.  Control is defined as getting behind the opponent and taking them to the mat or taking them directly to their back without getting behind them and becoming the offensive wrestler.

**Reversal** - **2** points - Awarded to a wrestler when they go from the defensive position to the offensive position and take control away from the opponent.  If a wrestler is on the bottom and gets to the top without an escape, they are awarded a reversal.

**Escape** - **1** point - Scored when a defensive wrestler gets away from the offensive wrestler and becomes neutral.  This happens most commonly when a wrestler chooses to start on the bottom in the 2nd or 3rd period.

**Near fall (3 second)** -**2** points - When you have your opponent on their back, and their back is at an angle to the mat of 45 degrees or less, the referee will start waving their hand to signify a count.  If the angle is maintained for 3 seconds, the offensive wrestler is awarded 2 points.

**Near fall (5 second)** - **3** points - Same as a 3-second near fall, but the 45-degree angle must be maintained for a 5-second count.  After a 3 point near fall is awarded, no more near falls will be awarded until the defensive wrestler gets off their back, and then is moved back into a new near fall.

**Penalty** - **1** point to opponent - There are several penalties, which would cause a referee to award a penalty point to your opponent.  Locking hands is most common, and you will see the ref clasp their hands together in the air right before they award the penalty.  Other penalty points can be awarded for things like stalling (not trying to get a pin, doing nothing to maintain a point lead, not trying to gain control), swearing, kicking, scratching, biting, hitting, body slamming, or bending any body part beyond it’s normal range of motion (you may hear this referred to as “**potentially dangerous**” and it will stop the bout temporarily).

**How Score is kept**

At the beginning of a bout, your child will put on a green or red ankle band.  You will also notice the referee has two wristbands on, green and red.  When a wrestler scores points, you will see the referee raise the hand with the corresponding color of the wrestler’s ankle band and hold up the number of points scored.  There are two scorekeepers at the table, one running the scoreboard and another tracking the bout on the scorecard to ensure accuracy.  The scoreboard will always have green and red scores, and the person running the scoreboard will adjust the score based on the color wristband the ref is holding up and the number of points he is indicating.

**Types of Victories**

Based on how you win your bout, the win can be categorized in several ways.

**Pin/Fall** - Can happen at any time in a bout and ends the bout.  At the referee’s discretion, if both shoulders of the defensive wrestler are touching the mat, the wrestler is pinned.

**Technical fall** - Also can happen at any time in the bout, when one wrestler takes a 15 point or greater lead, the bout is over and the wrestler is awarded a technical fall.

**Major Decision** - Can only happen when the match is over, awarded when a wrestler wins by 8-14 points.

**Decision** - Can only happen when the match is over, awarded when a wrestler wins by 1-7 points.

**Forfeit** - A forfeit victory is awarded when a wrestler does not have an opponent to wrestle (usually because their opponent did not show up).

**Disqualification** - A wrestler wins a match by disqualification when the opponent is disqualified from the match because of too many penalties or when a wrestler is illegally injured by an opponent’s illegal hold and cannot continue wrestling.

**Bout Length**

Bouts at the youth level usually consist of three one-minute periods.  You will often see this denoted as “1-1-1” on tournament registration forms.  Our team meet bouts will always be 1-1-1.  On the rare occasion a youth tournament will deviate from this, maybe to a 1.5-1.5-1.5, it would usually be in the older age groups, like Junior.  Again, make sure to **read the registration form closely**.  As a first year parent, it is a safe bet ALL of your child’s bouts will be 1-1-1.

In the event of a tie, the bout will go to a “**sudden victory**” overtime.  In this overtime, both wrestlers will start neutral, and the first wrestler to score will win the bout.

**Recommendations**

1. **Wrestle as much as possible**.  Try to make all the Keystone site matches, qualifier and Tournament of champions if you qualify, the team meets, and try to attend as many tournaments as you can.  In wrestling, practice can only do so much, and the wrestlers who excel are usually the ones who have the most bouts.  If you are only getting 2 bouts at team meets and your child is doing well in them, talk to a coach about what you can do to get a third or fourth bout.
2. **Do not be discouraged**.  In the first year of wrestling, .500 is an amazing record.   Your child may have been on an undefeated football or baseball or soccer team, but it is very rare that a wrestler goes undefeated in a season, and they will learn to win and lose on a completely new level in wrestling, because the outcome of a bout is based 100% on them.  Make sure to encourage them, win or lose, and teach them that they will learn much more from a loss in wrestling than they will from a win.  After a loss, make sure to tell them “great job” and then say something like “let’s talk to the coach about what we can do differently next time”.
3. **Practice-** Get your child to wrestling practice, you will never ever regret it.
4. **Record your child’s matches**.  Even if it is just with the video camera on your phone, this serves several great purposes.  First, you can use the video to learn what your child did wrong or what they could have done differently.  Second, it is a lot of fun to watch later on!  Finally, you can upload the video to Facebook or any other social service.

**Conclusion**

Again, best advice, ask, ask, and ask!  Next best advice...patience.  You will not get wrestling overnight.  When you do, it is almost addictive.  Making the transition from a parent asking questions to a parent answering questions is also a great feeling.  Wrestling is a HUGE commitment as a parent, but if you make that commitment to your child, I can guarantee it is worth it for both of you.