

# Parents, coaches need to be wise enough to emphasize effort, fun

*(Editor's Note: Mike Clayton is USA Wrestling's Manager of the National Coaches Education Program. He has extensive experience coaching at the youth, high school, college and international levels.)*

Of course winning matters, but it might not matter quite like you think it does. Do you like to win? I love to win! Not much brings more joy than seeing athletes we know or athletes we work with win. Who doesn't love watching the USA win gold in Rio or at events around the world?

But does winning alone make someone a successful coach or athlete? Do you know programs that win but lack morals? Do you know programs that win but kids get burnt out of the sport before the end of high school? Do you know youth programs that pump out amazing young wrestlers only to have little or none of them go on to successful wrestling careers at the high school, collegiate, or international levels? Of course you do.



WIN FILE PHOTO

Retention from youth wrestling to the next level is a significant problem in the sport.

We all do. Are they successful? Does watching a club or athlete win tons of trophies mean they are successful? Do these kids learn techniques they will need to rely on at elite levels (and I don't mean elite levels in youth wrestling), or do they learn a few "winning" moves that hamper the development of the key basic skills?

Youth wrestling is an important developmental opportunity but the trophies at the youth level really don't mean much as you grow in the sport. When Helen Maroulis won the gold in Rio, did anyone stop and say, "Yeah, she won an Olympic gold but how good was she when she was 8?" No, I didn't think so.

Jordan Burroughs is an amazing example of the USA Wrestling Athlete Developmental Model (ADM or LTAD). He was a one-time high school state champion as a junior and senior. Now at the international level, he is widely considered the greatest wrestler in the world with three World titles and one Olympic gold medal. But he continues to get better at each level.

How does he do it? Hard work is a large part, but without a love for the sport, each day's required effort would not be possible. Somewhere, someone made sure his wrestling experience was fun and meaningful. They helped him



Mike Clayton

## Athlete Developmental Model Resources

Want to help your athletes with age appropriate training recommendations and info? Check out our Athlete Development Model (ADM) at <http://content.themat.com/CoachesCorner/LTADPoster.pdf>

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develop the athletic feel and skills that allowed his future coaches to provide him with tools that helped him "win" and most importantly "learn and grow" each new level.

Our society is caught up with winning. That, by itself, is something we all can improve on because it devalues our kid's effort, skill development, positive attitudes, and much more. But, if we focus on the process of getting better each day, our athletes can see daily improvement which helps us keep them in our wrestling rooms. Most programs need numbers. Numbers grow when kids are coached (and parented) to work hard, develop a love for the sport (or other activity), and improve over time.

Have you ever seen a child (12 or younger) walk off the mat in complete anger, crying because they lost a match? Why do you think that child is crying? I'd say that most times, it is because a parent or coach emphasizes winning so much that when a child loses a match, they feel they won't receive the love or approval of the coach or parent that they so eagerly want to earn.

Do your kids/athletes know they have value beyond the wrestling mat? What do you know about the kids in your program that has nothing to do with wrestling? Do you know what they like to study? Do you know their families and home life? Do you know if they have a boyfriend or girlfriend? Getting to know your athlete will show them you care about them, not about them winning to make you and your program look good.

What is your job as a youth coach? In my eyes, it is to ensure the kids you work with at the youth level make it to the next coach. That they enjoy the sport, know something about the rules and moves but are going to the next level excited and better athletically, mentally, and socially than they came to you and your program. For me, I'd include that we have helped that athlete develop some personal skills like humility, hard work, dedication, sacrifice, nutritional awareness, and other life skills. That's it. To me, that is what makes a winner.

I cringe when I see pictures of the kids with trophies taller than they are. We are sending a message to kids that the end result is the true pay-off. It's not. In Rio, the best in the world gathered and only one went home with a gold medal. But, each athlete that represented their country at the Olympics goes home a winner. They have achieved a milestone that most of us only dream of. Somewhere, someone made sure they loved the sport and made it to the next level.

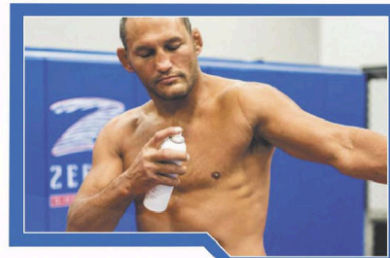
While I was at Annapolis, Admiral Lynch invited a few Midshipmen to his home for a party, where there was legendary athletic trainer, Red Romo. Red had been the athletic trainer for Navy football when Admiral Lynch was the center for Roger Staubach.

When Admiral Lynch stood up in his own home and left an empty plate on a table by his chair, Red shouted at him across the room, "Tommy, you'd better clean up after yourself. Don't make someone else do it!" And you know what, the Admiral turned around and picked up that plate.

Values are values regardless of winning, losing, or your title in life. ■

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