



# The Progression of a Wrestler

Donovan Panone - Head Coach Pope Jr. Wrestling – dpanone@gmail.com

## Where it Starts

Every wrestler starts with different tools to be successful. Some are naturally strong, some are fast, some are technical and some have great balance. And then some aren't blessed with the natural skills right off the bat. But they have the determination to get better and that's what will allow them to go farther than someone with natural ability alone.

For some, it clicks right away. For the majority, however, it takes time to become good at wrestling. It is not an easy sport and it isn't for everyone. But, the lessons you learn and the feeling you get when your hard work enables you to win far outweighs the blood, sweat and tears it took to get there.

## 10 Steps Toward Wrestling Success

In order to enjoy the sport, a wrestler must find success. The practices are simply too hard and getting beat every day isn't fun enough to treat it like a recreational sport. It's not that winning is the only thing, but pulling off moves and winning matches is a lot more fun than losing. While each wrestler will progress at different speeds, the following are the steps they will follow.

**Step 1: Show Interest** – Some kids are attracted to wrestling because it's physical. Some enjoy the idea of learning "cool moves". And others like the aspect of individual competition. It could also be that their friends talked them into it. But at some level, there is a spark of motivation that starts it off.

**Step 2: Learn the Basics** – The basics are everything in wrestling. It doesn't matter how many moves you know if you can't master the basics.

**Step 3: Get Beat & Learn to Lose** – Many first year wrestlers only win a few matches and some do not win any. And while some seem to pick things up quickly, they still get their butts kicked by the kids who are already in the room. Brand new wrestlers can and should go to beginner tournaments at first, but if they are finding early success they should move on. The mind and body adapts and will settle on what it takes to achieve success. No matter how quickly a wrestler picks up the sport, you cannot be successful in wrestling without getting beat and pushing through adversity.

**Step 4: Get Beaten Some More** – Whether in matches or with more experienced wrestlers in practice, you are going to take some lumps early on. For some, this may take a year or two before realizing what it takes to succeed.

**Step 5: Decide You Want to Get Better** – At some point a wrestler will make a choice. He either doesn't like the sport enough to push through the adversity OR he decides he wants to get better. Maybe in the course of getting your butt kicked, you pull off a move in practice or you get close to scoring and the taste of victory was enough to motivate you to want it more. But at some point, a decision is made to want to improve and you start setting goals for yourself.



**Step 6: Work your Tail Off** – Now that the decision has been made, the next step is to put in the time and effort to get better. But you cannot improve at wrestling by just showing up to practice. You have to come in hungry to learn and ready to work. And while practice is important, it's what you do outside of the room that will separate you from your competitors.

**Step 7: Get Mat Time** – This is one of the most overlooked, yet most important ways to improve. There is a direct correlation to the number of matches you wrestle and your ability to succeed. You can't get better at wrestling by just showing up to practices.

**Step 8: Breakthrough Moment** – At some point there is an “a ha” moment and something clicks to unlock the next level (see below). This could be improving a certain technique or simply overcoming a mental obstacle. But at some point, things become clear and you now start winning more and gaining more confidence.

**Step 9: Seek out Tougher Competition** – You cannot move levels without this. I repeat. You cannot move levels without finding ways to get outside of your comfort zone and adapt to a new level of wrestling.

**Step 10: Continuously Repeat Steps 4-9** - At each level you move to, you will face new adversity and will need to continue to push yourself in order to get better.

## 9 Levels of Wrestling Success

So what does it mean to go to the “next level”? As you repeat the cycle of improving, getting beaten and improving some more; a youth wrestler will move up through different tiers of success. At some point, of course, a wrestler will move on to high school and the cycle continues. How quickly a wrestler moves through these steps depends on the work put in, mat time and the desire to progress.

**Level 1** – This sport is fun, but I'm losing a lot

**Level 2** – I'm starting to win matches at beginner tournaments, but I'm getting crushed at open ones. It's hard, but I think I'm starting to get it.

**Level 3** – I'm winning 1-2 matches each open tournament

**Level 4** – I consistently win 2-3 matches and I've placed in a couple of tournaments

**Level 5** – I am a pretty consistent placer with a couple of tournament wins under my belt

**Level 6** – I expect to win most local tournaments & matches

**Level 7** – State winner or placer; I am now traveling to seek out tougher competition and I win a few matches when I go. (Note: The attempt at level 7 can help speed along the progress toward level 6)

**Level 8** – I am starting to place in national tournaments and I dominate local ones

**Level 9** – I'm officially a national stud, placing and competing for the win every time