**Why football players should wrestle**

By Matthew Wernikoff

Recently I was asked by a parent whether or not his son should continue to wrestle.  A Junior, for a good football program in NY, he was already receiving several scholarship offers from Division I football programs.  The father felt that his son benefited from wrestling but the son felt that he should just focus on the sport he was going to play in [college](http://apexwrestlingschool.com/category/wrestlers/college/).  The father asked me to outline the benefits of wrestling for football players and attempt to “prove” to his son that his scholarship offers would only increase if he continued to wrestle his last two seasons.  I happily agreed as there is no doubt that wrestling greatly benefits football players on all levels.



“I love [wrestlers](http://apexwrestlingschool.com/category/wrestlers/); they are tough and make great Football players.” –Mike Stoops National Championship Football Coach at Oklahoma University.

**Physical Skills**

Wrestling is one of the most physically demanding sports that any athlete can partake in.  It is a total body sport requiring athletes to be flexible, strong, explosive, agile; to have a great sense of balance; and have the level of conditioning that rivals any other endurance sport.  Wrestlers, through the course of their training and competition, are often subject to physical discomfort and pain at a level that far exceeds most sports.  These skills benefit football players at all levels, from the ability to move laterally, keep a man in front of you and close the distance quickly, to driving a 225lb running back into the ground and forcing the fumble.  There is no doubt that a wrestler’s physical-ness is a skill set desired by all coaches.

“Wrestlers make coaching football easy, they have balance, coordination, and as a staff we know they are tough.”  -Tom Osborne College Hall of Fame Coach for the University of Nebraska.



Stephen Neal- New England Patriots, 1999 World Freestyle Champion

**Mental Skills**

Weight management, the discipline to maintain a healthy diet for 6 months or more out of the year, the drive to give a 100% every practice, and the drive it takes to wake up early everyday to get an extra run in are just some of the mental skills that it takes to be a successful wrestler.  But none compare to the mental toughness it takes to walk out on a mat, alone with no teammates to help you win and take on an opponent one on one.  Nothing compares to that feeling; whether  you have a broken finger, bruised ribs, strained or torn knee ligament, a wrestler knows that for 6 minutes nothing else matters but putting his opponent on his back and getting his hand raised in the end.  What football coach wouldn’t want an athlete on their team that is always going to give them 100%  An athlete that they never have to tell, “hit the weight room,” or “you should get extra laps in after practice?”  A true wrestler always wants to be the first to arrive and the last to leave.  A wrestler is self reliant and will never blame his teammates for his loss.  Wrestlers are mentally tough.

“I draft wrestlers because they are tough, I’ve never had a problem with a wrestler.” –Joe Gibbs Hall of Fame Football Coach.

**Physiological Skills**

Hand eye coordination, proprioception and anaerobic conditioning are three skills that are vital to both wrestling and football player!  The definition of proprioecption is, “the ability to sense the position and location and orientation and movement of the body and its parts.”  It utilizes all of the senses in the body.  It is the ability to know where your body is in the space you are in, without having to look at your body.  In other words, when a wrestler is in a scramble and his head is stuck underneath his opponent and without looking he is able to move his whole body, all four limbs, often in different directions at the same time, while simultaneously keeping track of his opponent’s entire body and staying in-bounds to finish the takedown; this is proprioception.  On a football field an offensive linemen, for example, has to keep track of the man in front of him, his body, the bodies to his right and left and the quarterback behind him all at the same time.  A wrestler is forced to hone this skill everyday in a competitive practice environment.  This repetitive practice can only benefit a football player.



“I would have all of my offensive linemen wrestle if I could.” –John Madden, Hall of Fame Football Coach and Broadcaster

Anaerobic conditioning is defined as as your ability to perform at a rate faster than can be met by oxygen supply.  Short bursts of intense exercise tax your anaerobic system.  Wrestling is a combination of Anaerobic and aerobic metabolisms however, it relies heavily on anaerobic conditioning within a match or tournament.  It is because of this that wrestlers are often saught after by football coaches because they are in superior shape to athletes who do not work their anaerobic system.

“Once you’ve wrestled, everything else in life is easy.” –Dan Gable Hall of Fame Wrestler and Wrestling Coach

**Influence of Wrestling on the NFL:**

**12 Hall of Fame Members**

**43+ Multiple Time Pro-Bowlers**

**60+ Individual State Wrestling Championships**

**13 NCAA Wrestling Championships**

**3 Heisman Trophy Winners Wrestled**

**And currently: 63 RB’s, 23 LB’s, 2 QB’s, 66 Linemen, 6 DB’s, 1 K, all wrestled.**

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*Here are some interesting links the further expand on the correlation between football and wrestling:*

<http://www.hammondwrestling.com/nflwrestlers.shtml>

<http://www.mightymarauder.com/advantageofwrestling.htm>

Which has this nice little bullet point list of reasons to wrestle and play football:

1. **1.       Agility–The ability of one to change the position of his body efficiently and easily.
2. Quickness–The ability to make a series of movements in a very short period of time.
3. Balance–The maintenance of body equilibrium through muscular control.
4. Flexibility–The ability to make a wide range of muscular movements.
5. Coordination–The ability to put together a combination of movements in a flowing rhythm.
6. Endurance–The development of muscular and cardiovascular-respiratory stamina.
7. Muscular Power (explosiveness)–The ability to use strength and speed simultaneously.
8. Aggressiveness–The willingness to keep on trying or pushing your adversary at all times.
9. Discipline–The desire to make the sacrifices necessary to become a better athlete and person.
10. A Winning Attitude–The inner knowledge that you will do your best – win or lose.**

<http://www.timesfreepress.com/news/2011/dec/17/wrestling-big-help-in-football/>

**Famous Football Players that Wrestled:**

**Roddy White, Atlanta Falcons, 2X SC State Champion**

**Ray Lewis, Baltimore Ravens, 2X State Champion**

**Stephen Neal, 3X Super Bowl Champion with the New England Patriots, 2X NCCA National Champion for Cal State Bakersfield and 1999 World Freestyle Champion**

**Lorenzo Neal, 4X Probowler for the Baltimore Ravens, 2X NCCA All-American and California State Wrestling Champion**

Rodney Michael

Marques Harris – CO State Champ

Larry Turner

Andrew “Tyler” Lenda – District Champ

Matt Roth – IA State Champ

David Pollack

Tim Burrough – OK State Champ

Antoineo Harris – IL State Champ

Claude Harriott

Scott Wells – TN State Champ

Alex Lewis – District Champ

Rodney Leisle

Nick Newton

Sean Tufts

Brian Save

Kevin Atkins

Josh Minkins – District Runner-up

Tim Euhus

Andrew Tidwell-Neal – MN State Champ

Renaldo Works

Patrick “Bucky” Babcock – IL State Champ

Morgan Pears

Flozell Adams, DE, Dallas Cowboys

Tim Anderson – OH State Champ

Art Baker, RB, Buffalo Bills

Rhonde Barber, SS, Tampa Bay Buccaneers

Tiki Barber, RB, New York Giants

Walter Barnes, DL, Washington Redskins – SEC Champ

Eric Bateman, OL, New York Jets

Harris Benton

Brad Benson, New York Giants – PA State Champ

Greg Boone, RB, Oakland Raiders

Ryan Binghom, Sand Diego Chargers – 2x State Champ

Jeff Bostic\*, C, Washington Redskins – SC State Champ

Kevin Breedlove – SC State Finalist

Clinton “C.J.” Brooks, Jr.

Ronnie Brown, RB, Miami Dolphins (#2 Pick)

Tedy Bruschi\*, ILB, New England Patriots

Bob Bruenig\*, LB, Dallas Cowboys

Phil Bryant, Philadelphia Eagles – 2x National Prep Champ

Luis Castillo, DT, San Diego Chargers (First Round Pick)

Ralph Cindrich, Houston Oilers – PA State Runner-Up

Jonathan Condo, LS, Dallas Cowboys – PA State Champ, Dapper Dan Champ

Tom Cousineau\*, LB, Cleveland Browns  – 3rd State

Tom Covert\*, OT, Chicago Bears

Benjamin Claxton – GA State Finalist

Chris Cooley, TE, Washington Redskins

Colin Cole, Seattle Seahawks

Jonathan Condo

Roger Craig\*, RB, San Francisco 49’ers

Andrew Crummy – Cincinatti Bengals

Damien Covington, LB, Buffalo Bills

Curley Culp\*, DL, Kansas City Chiefs – NCAA Champ

Larry Czonka\*\*, RB, Miami Dolphins

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|  | Hall   of Fame Running Back from the Miami Dolphins, Larry Czonka, pounded opponents   on the wrestling mat as well as the gridiron. |

Rob Davis, ST, Green Bay Packers

Dan Dierdorff\*\*, OT, St. Louis Cardinals

Donnie Edwards, OLB, San Diego Chargers

Carl Edwards, San Diego Chargers – 3x MD State Champ

Rob Essink, Seattle Seahawks – NCAA DII Champ

Jim Everett, QB, New Orleans Saints

DeMarco Farr, St. Louis Rams

Patrick Flannery, OL, Houston Oilers

Ed Flanagan, C, Detroit Lions

Tony Fiametta – Carolina Panthers

Terrell Fletcher, RB, San Diego Chargers

Bill Fralic\*, G,  Atlanta Falcons

Doug France\*, LT, Los Angeles Rams – OH State Runner-Up

Antonio Garay, DL, Chicago Bears – State Champ

Frank Garcia, C, St. Louis Rams – 2x AZ State Champ

William George, Chicago Bears – 2x PA State Champ

Charlie Getty, RG, Kansas City Chiefs – 2x NCAA All-American

John Gilmore, TE, Chicago Bears

Kevin Glover\*, C, Detroit Lions

Eric Ghiaciuc, C, Cincinatti Bengals – MI State Champ

La’Roi Glover\*, DE, Dallas Cowboys

Mike Goff, G, Cincinnati Bengals

Bob Golic\*, DT, Cleveland Browns – OH State Champ

Mike Golic, DE, Philadelphia Eagles

Darien Gordon, PR/CB, Denver Broncos

Scottie Graham, RB, Minnesota Vikings

Tim Green, DE, Atlanta Falcons

Kelly Gregg, NT, Baltimore Ravens, 3x KS State Champ

Morlon Greenwood, OLB, Miami Dolphins

Archie Griffin, HB, Cincinnati Bengals

Nick Griesen, LB, New York Giants

Randy Grossman, TE, Pittsburgh Steelers

John Hannah\*\*, G, New England Patriots

John Hartunian

Nick Hardwick – San Diego Chargers

Nick Harper, CB, Tennesee Titans

Carlton Haselrig\*, Pittsburgh Steelers, 3x NCAA Champ

William Hayes, Tennesee Titans

Ron Heller, TE, Seattle Seahawks

Chad Hennings, DT, Dallas Cowboys – IA State Champ

Jay Hilgenberg\*, C, Chicago Bears – IA State Runner-Up

Lincoln “Drew” Hodgdon, C, Houston Texans – CA State Champ

Orlando Huff, MLB, Seattle Seahawks

Joey Hildbold

Corey Hulsy, G, Oakland Raiders

John Jackson, T, Pittsburg Steelers

Bo Jackson\*, RB, Oakland Raiders

Mario Johnson, DT, New England Patriot

Cody Johnson

Trevor Johnson

Dahanie Jones, LB, Cincinatti Bengals

Henry Jordan\*\*, DT, Green Bay Packers

Dave Joyner, OL, Green Bay Packers

John Jurkovich\*, DT, Cleveland Browns

Alex Karras, Detroit Lions

Patrick Kearney, DE, Atlanta Falcons

Tim Krumrie\*, DL, Cincinnati Bengals – WI State Champ

Ernie Ladd, DL, Kansas City Chiefs

Chris Laskowski

Nick Lecky, C, – KS State Champ (in 2004 NFL Draft)

Jess Lewis, LB, Houston Oilers

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| Ray   Lewis, Pro Bowl Linebacker for the Baltimore Ravens, was a Florida 4A State   Wrestling Champion at 189 lbs. |  |

Ray Lewis\*, Baltimore Ravens – 2x FL State Champ

Nick Leckey – TX State Champ

Ronnie Lott\*\*, DB, San Francisco 49’ers

Kirk Lowdermilk\*, OL, Minnesota Vikings

Sean Mahan, G, Tampa Bay Buccaneers

Mike Malczyk, LS, New York Giants

Alex Mack – Cleveland Browns

Joel Mackavicka, RB, Seattle Seahawks

Steve Martin, DT, Houston Texans

Mickey Marvin, RG, Oakland Raiders

Aaron Maybin, DE – Buffalo Bills – 4th State

Napolean McCallum, RB, Oakland Raiders

Randle McDaniel\*, G, Minnesota Vikings

Mark McDonald, SS, Arizona Cardinals

Chris McIntosh, T, Seattle Seahawks

Bryant McKinnie, T. Minnesota Vikings

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|  | Future   Hall of Famer Randall McDaniel was a wrestler before he was named to 12 NFL   Pro Bowls. |

Scott McKillop – San Francisco 49’ers

Gerald McRatha – Tennesee Titans

Greg Meisner, DL, Los Angeles Rams

Matt Millen\*, LB, Oakland Raiders

Ronald Moore, RB, Cleveland Browns

James Mungro, HB, Indianapolis Colts

Jim Nance, FB, New England Patriots – NCAA Champ

Lorenzo Neal, FB, Tennessee Titans – NCAA Champ

Stephen Neal, OL, New England Patriots – NCAA Champ

Jeremy Newberry, C, San Francisco 49’ers

Chuck Noll, Pittsburgh Steelers – PA State Champ

Leo Nomellini\*, T, San Francisco 49’ers – Big 10 Champ

Jonathan Ogden\*, OT, Baltimore Ravens

Shane Olivea

Irv Pankey, Los Angeles Rams – 2x MD State Champ

Tony Pape, San Diego Chargers

Mike Patterson, DT, Philadelphia Eagles (First Round Pick)

David Patten, WR, New England Patriots

Brandon Pearce, Arizona Cardinals

Scott Peters, G, New York Giants

Bob Pickens, OL, Chicago Bears

Jim Plunkett\*, QB, Oakland Raiders

Dave Porter, T, Green Bay Packers

Chris Pressley, Cincinatti Bengals

Mike Pyle, C, Chicago Bears – IA State Champ

Rocky Rasley, G, Detroit Lions

Mike Reid, Cincinnati Bengals

Eric Rhett, RB, Cleveland Browns – FL State Champ

Willie Roaf\*, OT, New Orleans Saints

Erik Robertson, San Diego Chargers

Leon Robinson – GA State Runner-Up

Warren Sapp\*, DT Tampa Bay Buccaneers – FL State Champ

Kevin Sampson – NJ State Champ

Adam Seward, ILB, Carolina Panthers – NV State Champ

Mark Schlereth\*, OL, Washington Redskins – Alaska State Champ

Cory Schlesinger, LB, Detroit Lions – NE State Champ

Steve Sefter, DT, Philadelphia Eagles, 2x PA State Champ & NCAA All-American

Tony Siragusa\*, DT, Baltimore Ravens – NJ State Champ

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| Pro   Bowl Defensive Tackle Warren Sapp was a Florida State Champion wrestler in   [High School](http://apexwrestlingschool.com/category/wrestlers/high-school/). |  |

Fred Smerlas\*, Buffalo Bills – MA State Champ

Bruce Smith\*\*, DE, Washington Redskins

Brad St. Louis, TE, Cincinnati Bengals

Larod Stephens-Howling – Arizona Cardinals

Alex Stepanovich

Matt Suhey, RB, Chicago Bears

Bill Szott, OL, Washington Redskins – NJ State Champ

Dave Szott, Kansas City Chiefs – NJ State Champ

Terrance Taylor – Indianapolis Colts – State Champ

Woody Thompson, RB, Atlanta Falcons – PA State Champ

Jim Thorpe\*\*, HB, New York Giants

Mike Trgovac, DC, Carolina Panthers – OH State Champ

Kyle Turley\*, T, St. Louis Rams

Tai Tupai

Ryan Turnbull, RB, Cleveland Browns

Tommy Vardell, RB, San Francisco 49’ers

Adam Vinatieri\*, K, New England Patriots

Gabe Watson, Arizona Cardinals

Gregory Walker – State Finalist

John Ward, OL, New York Jets – NCAA All-American

Fred Weary, C, Houston Texans – AL State Champ

Zachary Wilson

Charles White\*, HB, Los Angeles Rams

Randy White\*, DT, Dallas Cowboys

Roddy White, WR, Atlanta Falcons – 2x SC State Champ (First Round Pick)

Cory Widmer, LB, New York Giants

Coy Wire, SS, Buffalo Bills – PA State Champ

Leo Wisniewski, NT, Baltimore/Indianapolis Colts – PA State Champ

Steve Wisniewski, G, Los Angeles/Oakland Raiders – CA State Champ

Ricky Williams\*, RB, Miami Dolphins

Coy Wire, LB, Buffalo Bills – PA State Runner-Up

Greg Wojochowski, St. Louis Rams

\*Pro-Bowler

\*\*Hall of Famer