

First I want to give credit to Russ Helickson, former Ohio State wrestling coach and Ted Witulski, former director of coach's education for USA Wrestling whose work I stole shamelessly for this speech.

## **Wrestling is...**

When I began to think of a topic to speak about tonight I was at a loss, after all I have stood at this podium for more than a decade and reflected on the seasons past and said some tearful goodbyes to people who I have come to see as my little brothers and my surrogate sons as they move forward into the next exciting phase of their lives, lives that have been enhanced by their time playing our mat game. Well tonight is different. There are no goodbyes; there is no need for tears. Instead I decided to go looking for some definitions for our sport, things to help us know more about what wrestling is and what it does that has such an incredible impact on our lives. Being a part of a wrestling team is a life changing experience, whether you do it for a season or for a lifetime. I know it has changed my life and I never even stepped on the mat. Just being a part of this sport over the last 35 or so seasons has made me a significantly better person. You being a part of this sport and team, for however long, has without doubt made you better people too.

In my attempt to discover what wrestling really is and to be able to explain it to you I went first to Webster's dictionary who defines wrestling as: "A gymnastic exercise or contest between two competitors who attempt to throw each other by grappling". The word wrestle is defined as: "To contend by grappling and attempting to throw ones opponent to the ground". It is also defined as a struggle, or striving in an effort to master something. These definitions are all

correct but they really didn't get me any closer in my quest to understand what wrestling is.

Next I looked to history. When there was only a little of the woolly mammoth left on the carcass the residents of the cave did not run a foot race to see who got to eat, they didn't play horse to see who got the girl, and they didn't run a perfect fade route to see who was going to be the leader of the clan. They grabbed each other and rolled around until somebody came out on top. Even that phrase "came out on top", common in our discussions of sports, is talking about wrestling. From the earliest paintings on the walls of those caves there are depictions of wrestling. The hieroglyphics in the pyramids show wrestling contests and since there have been written records there have been descriptions of wrestling. Socrates said "I swear it upon Zeus an outstanding runner cannot be the equal of an average wrestler", and I'm sure Pastor Wenger can tell you the Old Testament tale of Jacob wrestling the angel. Wrestling is an integral part of history and has been documented throughout time in more than 150 forms. From this we can conclude that wrestling is a sport for the ages... **wrestling is**, the oldest and greatest sport in the world.

Then I looked to geography. There is no place on the planet where wrestling has not been a part of the culture. From the gigantic Japanese Sumo and the jacketed sombo of Russia, to Greco-Roman, freestyle, beach and collegiate wrestling, these are all different styles that are wrestled today. In the past there have been forms of wrestling that are as varied as every part of the planet. Schwingen in Switzerland, Coreeda in Australian, Icelandic Bon-dag-lima, Khuresh from Siberia or any of the hundreds of other folk styles of wrestling.

From its practice across the globe we know that...**wrestling is**, the universal sport.

Sociology tells us more about this pastime that brings us here tonight. Look at the person sitting next to you and think of the qualities that make them who they are, the things that guide them on their journey into being a quality person who will make a difference along the way: Accountability, responsibility, persistence, fortitude, strength, compassion, work ethic, ingenuity, determination, integrity, honesty, focus, diligence, team work, pride, hustle, dedication, and resolve. Wrestling is not the only place where one can develop these qualities but they all reside here. It was not by accident that a wrestler was chosen to be the first president of our new country and was no surprise that Abraham Lincoln brought a wrestling past with him to lead the country through its greatest crisis. Teddy Roosevelt, Zachary Taylor and William Howard Taft are a few of our presidents who shared that background as well along with many of our great military leaders. Oscar winning actors and moon-shot astronauts, winning jockeys and outstanding linemen, successful businessmen and cutting edge inventors, they all come from the ranks of wrestlers. On that horrible day in September of 2001 it was no surprise that many of those who stepped to the plate had a wrestling background; firemen, soldiers, policemen and maybe most notably a former All-State wrestler from New Jersey. Jeremy Glick was on a hijacked plane above Pennsylvania when he uttered the words "let's roll" and along with other passengers on that plane wrestled, on behalf of all of us, against terrorism. As Rick Reilly wrote in Sports Illustrated: "At a time like this, sports are trivial, but what the best athletes can do – keep their composure amid chaos, form a plan when all seems lost, and find the guts to carry it out – may

be why the Capitol isn't a charcoal pit". That is the height of what we can accomplish with the things we learn on the mat...**wrestling is**, a discipline where you can learn nearly all of the qualities it takes to live a meaningful and satisfying life.

Lastly I looked at philosophy. One of the questions that the brightest minds throughout history have often grappled with is "what do people know when they are born?" The concept is called innate knowledge. Breathing is innate. If you knew it when you were born it is innate within you – your mind – maybe even your soul. The great philosophers pondered this point as they studied the human condition. They all had their views on what this knowledge is but they all missed one obvious innate quality in those born to earth – wrestling. Wrestling is natural; it is essential; it is part of the human spirit. It exists in every culture and it has existed since the dawn of time. It spans the continents and is found within the rituals of societies and civilizations throughout the world. Simply put, the instinct of wrestling is inborn within all of us...**wrestling is**, innate.

So now that you know more about what wrestling is, it's time to gather your buddies, head back to the wrestling room for an off-season workout and begin to prove that you really were born to be a wrestler.