

[Freestyle, why not?](#)

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A conversation I have every year at the end of the folk-style season is, “Why wrestle freestyle?” The answer is plain and simple. Freestyle promotes attributes that greatly help folk-style wrestling. This is why the best folk-style wrestlers wrestle freestyle. I have different thoughts on why this is and what freestyle does for wrestlers. I think the change to freestyle helps not only technically, but has a profound effect for the mentality of wrestlers. Freestyle helps folk-style wrestlers by developing “mat awareness” and refining technique in neutral, providing a low stress environment necessary for kids to learn, changing scenery keeping wrestling new and fun, and making the biggest tournaments in the nation available creating another focus to motivate young wrestlers.

Freestyle is a difficult style to get used to on your feet, but this is the reason it is great for folk-style. All too many times I see kids shoot in on legs unable to finish or with their heads on the mat. In freestyle this could end the period. The repercussions of these tactical and technical mistakes are amplified in freestyle. How much better a wrestler would you be if you finished every time you touched a leg? Or at least never gave up a go behind for a takedown? What would be the reason to not shoot? Worst-case scenario is a fight back up to your feet. The mistakes that don't cost us too much in folk-style will cost us greatly in freestyle and with commitment to freestyle, your skills in folk-style will be sharpened. It also develops mat awareness. You see the kids who seem to always know where they are at on the mat, cutting angle to finish their shots in bounds, circling their backs away from the edge, or adjusting an opponent quickly in to get the pin inbounds. These are all necessity in freestyle and because you spend time strategizing and going over these situations; mat intelligence is increased.

Freestyle's culture is more relaxed and low stress. Thus it is an ideal environment to experiment and make mistakes needed to grow. The pressure involved with the folk-style season deters wrestlers from trying new things. In an environment where punishment for making mistakes is great, it is no surprise a bulk of growing takes place in the off season. Without the stress of dual meets and tournaments undivided attention can be focused on learning. We need to change gears and give ourselves the room needed to grow.

Not only will freestyle allow you space to expand your knowledge, it will also bring about new techniques that can be adapted to folk-style. People don't realize that the first turn I hit in my NCAA finals match was created off a freestyle move of Buvaisar Saitiev. Learning new techniques makes wrestling much more exciting and fun. Being able to play with new techniques and take time to understand them is something that your mind needs. This will help keep you a student of wrestling as well as keep you motivated to try new things and refine technique.

Having a season in the summer serves as another reason to train and improve. The biggest high school tournament in the U.S. is freestyle and is wrestled in the summer. This tournament helps gauge how far one has come and how much further it can be taken. Seeing the tournament and competing in it is one of the greatest and most humbling experiences one can have. Seeing the top wrestlers compete solidifies two things: it's going to be a lot of work, but it's possible to reach the top of the podium.

Freestyle is a key that a lot of America is missing, in addition to our ethics for hard work and sacrifice we also need to take a step back and put some thought into our wrestling, grow and enjoy a bit. It's time to reunite with our beginners mind. Get into freestyle and I promise you'll never turn back.

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