

Duck wrestlers' focus shows with dedication, hard work

Hard work, focus and dedication. These are the three phrases heard most often from athletes, parents and coaches in any sport. The three keys that help the athletes achieve their dreams.



Mindi Rice
The girl and the game

These are also the keys for the Oregon wrestling squad. When the Ducks practice, they work on technique, position and footwork. They prepare not just physically, but mentally.

These athletes have to be dedicated for the amount of hard work and focus the sport of wrestling takes.

Especially when wrestling in front of a crowd.

Take, for example, the Jan. 17 match, which featured the Ducks in a battle with California-Davis at McArthur Court. One UC Davis fan had a different cheer for every wrestler on the Aggies' squad, which he would shout through a plastic megaphone from the front row.

The "Let's go to Sam's Club" — one of the Aggies was named Sams — and "looks like someone forgot to eat their quackers for breakfast" cheers were enough to get on the nerves of fans on the other side of

the court.

How do the wrestlers handle it? They have to stay focused. That's the name of the game in wrestling.

Hard work is shown in every meet when the wrestlers make weight, score a takedown or win their match.

It takes long hours in the gym and an eye always on their plate for wrestlers to make weight every match. Those ten weight classes? The wrestler has to meet the weight — he can't be a single pound over.

In the training room, the Ducks work on the whole picture by working on the little things. Moving a foot two inches one way, keeping the elbows in and making sure to always know where the out-of-bounds line is keeps the coaches happy and the wrestlers in form.

On the mat during a meet, wrestlers focus on the moment — the next takedown, the time left in the period, their opponent's next step. Teammates and coaches yell from the bench. These are the only voices they can't tune out — ignoring the coach isn't allowed.

Focus is hardly its own concept. Hard work and dedication are incomplete without focus.

Dedication is not something that can be measured. Unlike hard work, which can be spotted through the little things a wrestler improves on over the course of a day or a season, dedication is the key to the big picture.

The dedicated wrestlers, those who spend as much time in the gym or mentally preparing for their next match as they spend working on homework, are the mark of a squad that wants to win. Homework doesn't suffer, it is completed, but wrestling isn't a hobby, it's a way of life.

Off the mat, the men on the wrestling squad are the same as you and I. They eat at the same places, they go to the same school and they take the same classes.

They even cheer for the same football and basketball teams.

The outstanding thing about the members of the wrestling squad is the hard work, focus and dedication they devote to a sport where they spend so much time rolling around on the ground.

Even the mats must hurt once in a while.

The wrestlers don't show it though. They roll and tumble and wrestle the next match. They move on to the next opponent, the next season, the next squad they compete with.

But as long as the men of the wrestling squad are still wrestling, they always have the three most important things — hard work, focus and dedication.

Mindi Rice is a freelance writer for the Emerald. Her views do not necessarily represent those of the Emerald.

Hager

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and some aren't — and are trying to fight through the rigors of practice and mid-terms, what happens can matter.

And to put anything more on these athletes, whether or not they pay attention, is unfair, and quite honestly, absurd.

Besides, would they be able to

do anything about the war anyway? I hardly doubt anyone in the stands could make the ultimate decision either.

I can see it now. Republicans and Democrats duking it out as usual, but not in the confines of their home or even in the streets of downtown Eugene. Oh no, now they've decided to go indoors to sporting events.

Please let that just be a nightmare.

If you think I'm a little out of range on this, you should've been there. Seeing signs protesting the war at a sporting event is a surreal experience, and one that I hope to never see again.

But I wouldn't be surprised if I did.

Contact the sports reporter at hankhager@dailyemerald.com. His views do not necessarily represent those of the Emerald.

Wrestling

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The Ducks' scoring featured impressive victories by junior Branson Phillips at 157 and redshirt junior Jason Harless at 133. Senior Casey Hunt, wrestling at 141, and sophomore Shane Webster, at 174, also won their matches.

Phillips is 6-9 on the season, but earned his first four-point major decision of the season on Sunday.

Webster is the highest-ranked Oregon wrestler at No. 11 in two polls and No. 12 in a third. He has won five-straight matches, leading the team with a 25-4 overall record.

"He's worked hard," head coach Chuck Kearney said. "He's gotten bigger and stronger. He's technically more sound."

Of Webster's 25 wins, five have come by technical fall, five were four-point major decisions and two came on pins.

Harless sits at No. 18 in Amateur Wrestling News' poll, and No. 19 by The Wrestling Mall. He is also listed in the "other wrestlers" section of the

Intermat rankings.

Harless missed the squad's trip to California for four dual meets with a knee injury. He returned to the mat Sunday, earning a 9-2 decision. Harless has won three straight matches, including a 12-3 major decision against then-No. 11 Mike Simpson of Arizona State.

"(Webster) has worked hard. He's gotten bigger and stronger. He's technically more sound."

Chuck Kearney
wrestling head coach

Senior Tony Overstake is No. 20 in Amateur Wrestling News' poll and in the "other wrestlers" section of the Intermat rankings at the 149 weight class. Sophomore Martin Mitchell is also listed in "other wrestlers" by Intermat at 125.

Overstake and redshirt sophomore

Luke Larwin both lost in double overtime on Sunday. Overstake is 18-8 on the season, while Larwin is 18-17. All 17 of Larwin's losses have come by a decision of seven points or less.

Mitchell did not wrestle Sunday, but leads the Ducks with eight pins on the season. His eight pins land him second in his weight class nationally for total pins. Mitchell has competed in only five of the nine Pac-10 duals this season, but he has pinned his opponent for the win in three of those five.

The Ducks will wrestle without Overstake or Harless, who will both sit out for this meet. Redshirt freshman Bob Pool will wrestle at 149 in Overstake's place, while redshirt freshman Jacob Boyles will wrestle for Harless at 133.

After facing off against the Vikings, Oregon has 10 days to rest and refocus for the Pac-10 Tournament hosted by Boise State. Last season, Oregon finished second at the tournament, sending eight wrestlers to the NCAA Championships.

Mindi Rice is a freelance writer for the Emerald.

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