We as humans are creatures of habit! I think the most important thing to take away from this is being consistent in your approach mentally and physically prior to competitions/matches. Creating a consistent routine physically will create comfort and confidence for your athletes knowing they are physically ready to compete. The tough part is creating a mental routine, but I feel if they know they are physically ready then they can focus and work on the mental aspect more easily. This is because they won’t wonder if they are physically prepared. Without this consistency in the warm-up it will be harder to create consistency mentally.

For my athletes this starts with the day before competition. We typically compete on Saturdays. So, Friday night workout is the starting point for my athletes preparing to compete. Normally this practice is at the venue we are competing in or the wrestling room at the school where we are competing. As a young coach when we would travel the night before and go to work out it was all about making weight. Guys would load up with tons of clothes and wouldn’t do much to get better that day. It was all about how much weight can I lose. Some guys would just want to run, others might drill a little bit but it was always slow and not how I would want my athletes to compete the next day. It just seemed like a wasted day. A waste of an opportunity to get better.

This is when I started running the workouts. I have been running workouts the day before we compete for the last 13-14 years. The workout isn’t long, it is actually 24 minutes of work after the warm-up. 1-3 minute drills with 30 seconds of rest between each drill. A little bit of recovery so that we are getting what we need out of each drill. The important factors of the workout are a high pace, high level of intensity, and high level of focus on the execution of our technique. The reasons that I started doing this:

1. The opportunity to get better when others aren’t. This gives my athletes about 15 opportunities to get better while many teams are not.

2. To push the idea of practicing the way you want to compete. I want my athletes to be aggressive, wrestle with a high pace, a high level of intensity, and focus. Being able to push hard and execute your offense correctly when you are under this stress goes a long way in having confidence you can execute correctly in the 3rd period of a match or overtime. It’s kind of like riding a bike. \* Gene Zannetti - wrestling mindset - talks about making competition like practice and practice like competition.

 3. Confidence-

A. This builds confidence in the fact that my guys learn that they can execute their offense late in a match when they are tired.

B. Mentally they go through this workout and bust their butts to get better, while our competition is doing very little to actually get better. This goes a long way for us mentally.

C. The guys that we are wrestling are doing a minimal amount of work and are feeling sorry for themselves. My guys are flying around and going hard. Do you think the guys watching us want to draw us the next day?

4. Weight- This is what we are least worried about, but the workout is always the same. My guys figure out after the first workout how much weight they can plan to lose every week. So as the season goes on they can better prepare where they need their weight to be prior to leaving the school so this isn’t guess work and they have the ability to eat.

Competition- Our morning warm-up is very similar to the night before workout. Warming up with a high level of intensity, pace, and focus similar to how we would want to compete. Now we all have that kid or know that kid that is a bad first match wrestler. This kid has a little more to do to figure out if he has prepared himself well enough to perform how he wants to in competition. If this kid sets this workout as a baseline of how he performs, he can then add things to this workout to figure out what he needs to do every time he wrestles to perform at his best right out of the gate. This may be extra drilling, live, or running.

Pre Match mental preparation- Positive Thoughts and focusing on things that are within our control

Just like our physical preparation this needs to be consistent and deliberate. This is the hardest part and some individuals never figure it out. Our minds can play tricks on us and we can create illusions quickly if we are not cognizant of our thoughts. Learning/working on the positive thoughts are just as important as eliminating negative thoughts. This takes a lot of work. I always talk to my guys about creating a record/playlist in their minds. Being positive in our thoughts and believing in ourselves has a huge impact on our performance as well as our success. The bigger the match or better the wrestle the more chance we have that our minds will sabotage us. Unless we have the mental skills to keep these positive messages in our heads and eliminate the negative thoughts as quickly as they enter. These negative thoughts can quickly fester and lead to more negative thoughts. So again we have to be cognizant of our thoughts and change them quickly.

Thought stoppage in my opinion is one of the easiest techniques to learn and it is exactly that, stopping the negative thought. We need to arm our athletes with a way to stop and redirect our minds back to the playlist. I have heard/learned three distinct ways individuals have used thought stoppage

1. Brandon Slay - Olympic Champion Using a baseball diamond to hit the negative thought out of his head.

2. Daryl Webber - NCAA Champion using a train to kick the negative thought into an open box car and have it carried out of his head.

3. When I was doing my master’s degree, this technique was talked about by just using a stop sign to stop the negative thoughts and get back to the positive thoughts/playlist.

The other thing that our athletes need to make sure they are focusing on are things within our control. They can’t be worried about the ref or their opponent. We can control our effort, our pace, our aggressiveness, our belief, our intensity level, our positive thoughts, etc.

For tournaments these physical and mental routines need to continue if we want to ensure that we continue to perform to the best of our abilities. We should prepare the same way physically for our second, third, fourth match, etc. If we create a routine and we perform well this should