

Youth wrestlers must learn new rules this year

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It may be the middle of the busy folkstyle season in America's schools, but spring is not that far away. For young athletes of all ages, it is not too early to look ahead to the international-style wrestling season.

This is especially true in 2006.

Wrestlers on all of the age group levels within USA Wrestling will be competing under new rules this year. Freestyle and Greco-Roman wrestling has changed dramatically since the last youth wrestling season. It makes sense for young athletes and their coaches, as well as their parents, to become familiar with the new rules.

As you may know, the rules of international wrestling changed after the 2004 Olympic Games. FILA, the international wrestling federation, announced some radical changes in the sport, which will be in effect at least through the next Olympic Games.

Last year, USA Wrestling's age-group wrestling programs did not use these new FILA international rules, except for in tournaments that were qualifiers for international competitions. America's youth still competed in the old international rules. That will no longer be the case. Starting in 2005-06, USA Wrestling age-group competitions in the international styles will all be contested with the new FILA rules.

The sport will seem a bit different when an athlete enters his or her first competition under the new rules. There are a few things you need to know.

- An athlete must win two of the three periods of a match to claim a victory. The structure is similar to a tennis match, with each period just like a set in tennis. Once a wrestler wins two periods, the match is completed.
- Each period is two minutes long.
- If an athlete steps out of bounds, the opponent receives a point.
- An athlete wins a period as a technical fall if he or she scores six points more than the opponent.
- A five-point throw automatically wins a period.
- If a period ends with a tie (except for 0-0), there is no overtime. There are specific tie-breaking rules to determine who wins the period. One of the key new concepts is that one of the tiebreakers is "last point scored."
- In major international events, all of the matches in each weight class are contested in one day.

The biggest change in freestyle wrestling is the new clinch position, where one athlete secures a single leg lock from the feet, with the opponent in a defensive position. This only occurs if there is no scoring during the period.

There has been a total change in Greco-Roman wrestling. The new rules dictate that there is now wrestling on the mat (called par terre) in each period. The first half of the period is contested on the feet. After that, each wrestler is placed on the bottom position for 30 seconds, with a new Greco-Roman clinch using a reverse lift.

The new rules will be used at major competitions such as the ASICS/Vaughan Junior and Cadet Nationals, the Kids National Freestyle and Greco-Roman Championships, the National Dual Meet Championships and the USA Wrestling Regional Championships.

Wrestlers and coaches on the Senior level have been using these rules for more than a year now. They are not something that people should be afraid of or worry about. The important thing to remember is that wrestling is still wrestling.

The skills that are required to succeed in wrestling remain the same, and the transition to the new rules should be smooth once the coaches and athletes give them a try. An example of that is what happened at the World Championships in Budapest, Hungary this fall. A majority of the wrestlers who won gold medals in Budapest were also World or Olympic champions under the old rules. The new rules allow for outstanding athletes to win.

There is no time like the present for the youth wrestling community to learn the new rules. It is recommended that you get a copy of the new rules and read them closely to get a better knowledge of how the rules are being implemented.

USA Wrestling has some modifications for the younger age groups here in the USA. In particular, for the clinch in Greco-Roman, the top wrestler must begin the reverse body lock with both of his/her knees on the mat. It was felt that with the variations of athletes in regard to strength, this modification would better prepare athletes to learn the proper techniques.

Anybody who is interested in learning the rules can download a copy of the official new FILA rules as a PDF file from TheMat.com (www.themat.com). Just click on the link entitled USWOA, and you will be sent to the U.S. Wrestling Officials Association site, where the PDF file is posted.

In addition, the FILA website also has considerable information on any of the current modifications of these rules. Just visit www.fila-wrestling.com, and click on the British flag in the upper left hand side to get the English version. Go to the section labeled "Wrestling" on the left hand side and review and print those documents. This material will give you a good working knowledge of the rules and assist with the assimilation of the rules into the practice room.

USA Wrestling's National Coaches Education Program is planning to have a video available on the new rules which should assist youth programs in understanding and adjusting to the new rules. There will be ongoing education provided by USA Wrestling to assist in the transition.

A few things to consider when coaches and athletes start gearing up for the international season:

- Coaches and their athletes must concentrate in their training is the new clinches in both freestyle and Greco-Roman.
- In every Greco-Roman match, each wrestler will get an opportunity to secure a reverse lift in par terre, and every wrestler must also defend against the reverse lift. In freestyle, athletes and coaches must spend time finishing the takedown from the leg hold in the clinch, as well as defending with the leg secured from the clinch.
- With the six-point technical fall possibility in each period, a wrestler will have to compete differently than in the past.

- Wrestling on the feet is very important in freestyle, because there is no forced par terre, and when athletes step out of bounds, the wrestling remains on the feet.

It is also a great idea to watch as much Senior-level international wrestling as possible, to see how the elite athletes are competing under the new rules. You can do this by attending Senior-level competitions, or watching events on the internet or on video. A number of USA Wrestling events will be posted on the internet on LiveSportsVideo.com, which allows you to see the nation's top wrestlers using the new rules. In addition, USA Wrestling's National Coaches Education Program often produces and sells highlight videos from major Senior-level events.

Please remember that although there are new rules in international wrestling, there are so many benefits for young people to compete in freestyle and Greco-Roman. These styles remain a tremendous opportunity for young athletes to learn the sport, improve their skills and receive outstanding competition. Once you get through the learning process and become comfortable with the changes, you will find why competing in the international styles is such a positive activity for athletes of all ages.