



SHORT LESSONS



COACHES  
LESSONS  
FOR  
WRESTLERS

BY JON GUMS



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BY

*Jon Gums*

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This book is dedicated to: Bert Gums

To My Hero my Dad North Dakota Wrestling Hall of Fame Member

Short Stories of his coaching are in the works... This is just a small one... So much more details could be added.

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## **Introduction**

1. Thank you for reading this short story one of many from Coach Gums, my Dad, Bert Gums some this is glorified info, or some is modernized for the current wrestling readers.
2. This Book is about Lessons for Wrestlers including all the teachable spirit a coach can bring to his team, points of interest for wrestlers including Self-awareness, Self-confidence, pride, humility, leadership, discipline, mental toughness, accountability, gratitude, trust in the process, and character building. Coach Gums left a legacy coaching that I can't completely comprehend as it is deep and very wide in coverage. Many of his wrestlers went on to be successful coaches, businessmen, doctors, lawyers, teachers, fathers and so much more from some of the lessons he taught his athletes!
3. This short story book is one of many... but it does cover topics every wrestler or fan of wrestling can learn from.
4. I would like to thank anyone who reads this and thinks of any coach they had in their lives which had a positive influence in their lives!

## **PART I: Life Lesson Starts Here**

Coach Bert Gums teaches life lessons for wrestlers.

As the sun rose over the wrestling mat... It began... HOF Coach Bert Gums, a 1964 Napoleon North Dakota high school graduate who wrestled because a coach said you look-like you are just the right size for our team. He had little success, but also tried college wrestling at Valley City State (teachers' college). Then, as a first-time teacher assigned wrestling coach at Garrison High School, worked hard, and learned to love a sport so much he dedicated a huge part of his life to it. I say first handed that he was always striving to be the best possible coach for his wrestlers first and foremost.

I remember he stood at the edge of that mat, waiting for his team to arrive. As they filtered in, on to the stage where they practiced, he greeted each one with a nod or a handshake, silently taking stock of their demeanor and attitude. In any sport or team, culture is a critical component of success, and for a coach, it is essential to create and maintain a positive and effective culture. When we talk about culture, we mean the shared values, beliefs, and behaviors that define a team or organization. Culture is the foundation on which a team's success is built, and it can make or break a team's chances of achieving its goals.

Coach Gums knew a good coach understands the importance of creating a positive and supportive culture that fosters growth, learning, and development for their athletes. A positive team culture encourages athletes to work hard, support one another, and strive for excellence. It also creates a sense of belonging, trust, and camaraderie among team members, which can lead to improved performance and a stronger team dynamic.

I am Jon Gums son of this coach and I can never completely write his story... as Coach Gums he was a complex man not Dad... that was a different roll he took...and I take his teaching to heart as I explain some of them, this will take years and many short stories to get in greater detail this man's passion... His passion to be the best!

To create a positive team culture, he must lead by example and set clear expectations for their athletes. Coach should promote an environment that values hard work, dedication, and teamwork while also being supportive, respectful, and inclusive. A good coach should encourage their athletes to take responsibility for their actions, hold themselves accountable for their mistakes, and strive for constant improvement.

Another critical aspect of a positive team culture is effective communication. A coach should establish an open and honest line of communication with their athletes, encouraging them to express their thoughts and feelings while also being receptive to feedback. This communication should be constructive, supportive, and focused on helping athletes grow and develop. He struggled with this early on because he was brought up in an environment where the boss is in charge in needed to control the wrestling environment... Coach Gums was a master of the

“Basics” and was a true believer that you can always learn to be better. He soon learned that his assistants were as critical as any part of a team and their culture. Thanks Barry McCleary!

“Culture” is the foundation of a successful team, and a good coach understands the importance of creating a positive and supportive team culture that fosters growth, learning, and development for their athletes. A positive team culture is built on shared values, beliefs, and behaviors that promote hard work, dedication, teamwork, effective communication, and constant improvement. By creating a positive team culture, a coach can help their athletes reach their full potential, both on and off the mat.

He knew that in order to build a successful team, he needed wrestlers who were willing to learn, willing to lead, and willing to take responsibility for their actions.

"Good morning, wrestlers," he said as they gathered around him. "Today, we're going to talk about what it takes to be a successful wrestler. And it starts with being teachable."

He paused to let that sink in. "You can have all the talent in the world, but if you're not willing to learn, you're never going to reach your full potential. So, I want you to be open to feedback, to criticism, to new ideas. Don't be afraid to ask questions, to try new things. Be a sponge, soak up everything you can."

The wrestlers nodded, some more enthusiastically than others. Coach Gums could see the wheels turning in their heads, the doubts, and the fears. He knew that confidence was key, so he continued.

By adopting these strategies, individuals can become more teachable and better equipped to learn, grow, and adapt to new situations.

Coach Gums that evening went home and made a list on his infamous yellow notebooks, he knows he wanted to focus on in great detail the concept of being teachable, and this is what he came up with:

Quotes from famous people,

- "Success is not final; failure is not fatal: It is the courage to continue that counts." - Winston Churchill
- "I have not failed. I've just found 10,000 ways that won't work." - Thomas Edison
- "The only way to do great work is to love what you do. If you haven't found it yet, keep looking. Don't settle." - Steve Jobs
- "Champions keep playing until they get it right." - Billie Jean King
- "The greatest glory in living lies not in never falling, but in rising every time we fall." - Nelson Mandela

Teachability is a crucial skill that enables individuals to learn, grow, and adapt to new situations. Being teachable means having an open mind, being willing to learn from others, and being receptive to feedback. Here are some strategies that can help someone become more teachable:

1. Cultivate a growth mindset: People with a growth mindset believe that their abilities can be developed through dedication and hard work. Encourage the person to embrace challenges, persevere through obstacles, and view failures as opportunities to learn and improve.
2. Practice active listening: Teach the person to listen attentively, ask questions, and seek clarification. Encourage them to be present in the moment and engage in active dialogue with others. This will help them better understand and retain information.
3. Be open to feedback: Encourage the person to receive feedback with an open mind, even if it is critical. Help them understand that feedback is not a personal attack but an opportunity to improve. Encourage them to ask for feedback and to use it constructively to make positive changes.
4. Develop a thirst for knowledge: Encourage the person to seek out new information and to explore new ideas. Encourage them to read widely, attend workshops and conferences, and network with others in their field.
5. Embrace humility: Help the person understand that being teachable requires humility. Encourage them to be open to learning from others, even those who may be less experienced or knowledgeable. Teach them to admit when they don't know something and to be willing to learn from those around them.
6. Set goals and track progress: Help the person set clear goals and track their progress. This will help them stay motivated and focused on their learning objectives. Encourage them to celebrate their successes and learn from their setbacks.
7. Practice self-reflection: Encourage the person to reflect on their learning experiences and to identify areas for improvement. Teach them to be self-aware and to seek out opportunities for personal growth and development.

## Chapter One: Growth Mindset

Coach Gums knew that cultivating a growth mindset was essential to the success of his wrestlers. He believed that his athletes could achieve great things if they had a positive attitude and were willing to put in the hard work and effort required to succeed.

At the beginning of the wrestling season, Coach Gums gathered his team together for a meeting. He explained to them the concept of a growth mindset and how it could help them achieve their goals.

"Guys, I want you to understand that your success on the mat is not determined solely by your natural abilities," Coach Gums began. "It's also determined by your mindset and your willingness to learn and grow as a wrestler."

He went on to explain that having a growth mindset means embracing challenges, persisting through obstacles, and viewing failures as opportunities to learn and improve. He encouraged his wrestlers to believe that they could improve their skills through hard work, dedication, and practice.

"To cultivate a growth mindset, you need to believe that you can improve," Coach Gums said. "You need to embrace challenges and view them as opportunities to learn and get better. And most importantly, you need to be willing to put in the effort and hard work required to achieve your goals."

Throughout the season, Coach Gums reinforced the importance of a growth mindset. He praised his wrestlers for their effort and dedication, and he encouraged them to persist through setbacks and failures. He reminded them that success wasn't just about winning matches, but also about learning and growing as athletes.

Coach took notes after every dual or tournament, noting what not only what the team needed to do to be better but finite details on each wrestler, moves to get better at and techniques to beat the next wrestlers. Seemingly, having a plan going into every practice. Today, we would call that a practice plan, but his were second nature and not required. He did it to be the best.

As the season progressed, Coach Gums saw a noticeable improvement in his wrestlers' attitudes and performance. They were more focused, determined, and committed to their goals. They were willing to put in the hard work and effort required to achieve success. He worked on his schedule to challenge his team with the best possible opponents in the state of North Dakota.

By cultivating a growth mindset, Coach Gums had not only helped his wrestlers become better athletes, but he had also instilled in them a valuable life lesson. He had taught them that with the right attitude and mindset, they could achieve great things, both on and off the mat.

Coach Gums knew that being teachable wasn't enough for his wrestlers to succeed. They also needed confidence in their abilities to execute what they had learned.

To build confidence in his wrestlers, Coach Gums praised their efforts and progress, even when they didn't win a match. He would point out the things they did well, and the areas they could improve on. This way, his wrestlers felt that their efforts were recognized, and they were motivated to continue working hard. Every wrestler was important, not just the most talented and wrestlers that won their matches. (Important for any coach to realize how they treat and coach their athletes).

He also encouraged them to set achievable goals and work towards them. He would break down the techniques and skills into smaller, manageable steps so that his wrestlers could focus on achieving success, one step at a time.

Coach Gums knew that confidence couldn't be forced upon his wrestlers. They had to believe in themselves and their abilities to achieve success. He would often remind them of the growth mindset he had taught them, emphasizing that mistakes and failures were opportunities to learn and improve.

As the season progressed, Coach Gums saw his wrestlers' confidence grow. They were not only teachable, but they were also willing to take risks and try new things. They trusted in their abilities, and they were not afraid to make mistakes.

In the end, Coach Gums knew that teaching his wrestlers to be both teachable and confident was critical to their success. He had shown them that with the right attitude, mindset, and hard work, they could achieve great things both on and off the mat.

"But being teachable isn't enough. You also need confidence. You need to believe in yourself, in your abilities. You need to know that you can do this, that you can win, that you can be a champion. Without confidence, you'll never be able to take risks, to push yourself, to overcome adversity."

He looked around the group, locking eyes with each wrestler in turn. "But don't let that confidence turn into pride. Don't think you're better than anyone else, that you don't need help, that you're invincible. Pride comes before a fall, as the saying goes. You need to balance your confidence with humility. You need to be willing to admit your weaknesses, to learn from your mistakes, to help others."

Coach Gums paced back and forth, his eyes scanning the group. "And that brings me to leadership. Being a wrestler means being a leader, on and off the mat. You need to set an example for your teammates, to inspire them, to encourage them. You need to be disciplined, to work hard, to stay focused. You need to have mental toughness, to push through pain, to handle stress, to stay positive."

He paused again, taking a deep breath. "But with leadership comes accountability. You need to take responsibility for your actions, for your decisions, for your performance. You can't blame

others, you can't make excuses, you can't give up. You need to own your mistakes, to learn from them, to improve. And you need to hold your teammates accountable as well, to challenge them, to support them, to hold them to the same high standards."

Coach Gums smiled, his blue eyes twinkling. "But let's not forget gratitude. Wrestling is a tough sport, and it can be easy to get lost in the grind. But you need to remember why you're doing this, to appreciate the opportunity, to be thankful for your teammates, your coaches, your opponents. You need to find joy in the journey, to celebrate the victories, big and small."

He paused once more, his gaze softening. "And finally, you need to build trust. Trust in yourself, in your teammates, in your coaches. You need to trust that everyone is working towards the same goal, that everyone is giving their best effort, that everyone is committed to success. You need to communicate, to listen, to be honest, to be reliable. Without trust, you can't have a strong team, and without a strong team, you can't achieve greatness." This speech came somewhere in between the 1979 and 1982 seasons in which Napoleon won 3 ND State wrestling tournaments.

The wrestlers looked at Coach Gums, some nodding, some frowning.

Coach Gums smiled, pleased with the response. "So, as you can see, there are a lot of lessons to learn as a wrestler. But they all come down to one thing: character. Your character is what defines you as a wrestler, as a teammate, as a person. It's what sets you apart from the rest."

He paused, letting the words sink in. "So, I challenge you to embrace these lessons, to embody these traits. Be teachable, be confident, be humble, be a leader, be disciplined, be mentally tough, be accountable, be grateful, build trust, and above all, let your character shine." Bert Gums was intelligent, so deep, I wish I could have captured more of his wise words.

The wrestlers nodded, some with determination, others with hesitation. But Coach Gums knew that it was all part of the process. He knew that not everyone would take these lessons to heart, that some would stumble along the way, that some would even quit. But he also knew that those who did embrace these lessons, who did embody these traits, would not only become great wrestlers but great people.

"And with that," he said, clapping his hands together, "let's get to work." The wrestlers scattered, heading to their warm-ups, their drills, their sit-outs, switches, and cradles. Coach Gums watched them go, his heart filled with hope and pride. He knew that they had a long road ahead of them, but he also knew that they were up for the challenge. After all, they were wrestlers.

## Chapter Two: Active Listening

Coach Gums understood that active listening was a vital skill for his wrestlers to learn. In wrestling, being able to listen and communicate effectively with coaches and teammates could make all the difference in a match. So, he made it a priority to teach his athletes how to practice active listening.

During team meetings and practices, Coach Gums would encourage his wrestlers to listen attentively and ask questions when they didn't understand something. He would also emphasize the importance of being present in the moment and engaging in active dialogue with others.

One day, during a team practice, Coach Gums noticed that some of his wrestlers were not fully engaged in what he was saying. He stopped the practice and called everyone together.

"Guys, I need you to be present and fully engaged in what we're doing here," Coach Gums said. "Active listening is a key component of being a successful wrestler. If you're not listening, you're missing out on valuable information that could make all the difference in a match." "When I say inside leg stand-up I mean inside leg stand-up!" "That move has a purpose and when to use it matters."

He then demonstrated how to practice active listening by asking his wrestlers to repeat back to him what he had just said. He encouraged them to ask questions and seek clarification when they didn't understand something.

Throughout the season, Coach Gums continued to reinforce the importance of active listening. He would frequently ask his wrestlers to summarize what they had learned during a practice or team meeting, and he would encourage them to engage in active dialogue with each other.

As a result of his efforts, Coach Gums saw a marked improvement in his wrestlers' ability to listen and communicate effectively. They were more engaged in practices and matches, and they were better able to understand and execute the strategies and techniques that he taught them.

In the end, Coach Gums knew that practicing active listening was a critical component of being a successful wrestler. He had taught his athletes how to be present in the moment, engage in active dialogue, and seek clarification when they needed it. These skills would not only help them on the mat but also in their lives beyond wrestling. Napoleon was known for the basics and all wrestlers on the team did them and did them correctly, with purpose!

## Chapter Three: Open to Feedback

Coach Gums knew that being open to feedback was crucial for his wrestlers' growth and development. He explained to his athletes that feedback was a tool for improvement and that it was essential to take it seriously and act on it.

He shared with his wrestlers how being open to feedback had helped him when he was a younger wrestler. Coach Gums told them a story about a time when he was struggling to improve his single takedown technique. He went to one of his coaches and asked for feedback.

"At first, I didn't like what my coach had to say. It was tough to hear that I needed to make changes to my single technique," Coach Gums said. "But I decided to listen to him and take his feedback seriously. I worked hard to make the necessary adjustments, and eventually, my single takedown technique improved significantly and became my best move."

He went on to explain that by being open to feedback, he had not only improved his wrestling skills but had also developed a better relationship with his coach. He realized that feedback was a way for coaches to help their athletes improve and succeed.

Coach Gums encouraged his wrestlers to seek feedback from their coaches and teammates. He reminded them that feedback was not criticism but an opportunity to learn and grow. He also taught them how to receive feedback graciously by listening attentively, asking clarifying questions, and showing gratitude for the feedback given.

Throughout the season, Coach Gums made sure to provide his wrestlers with regular feedback on their technique, performance, and attitude. He also created a safe and supportive environment where his athletes could provide each other with constructive feedback.

As a result of Coach Gums' emphasis on being open to feedback, his wrestlers became more receptive to criticism and willing to make changes to improve their technique and performance. They learned that feedback was an essential tool for their growth and development, both as wrestlers and as individuals.

Coach Gums knew that being open to feedback was an essential component of being a successful wrestler. He had taught his athletes how to receive and give feedback constructively, which would not only help them on the mat but also in their lives beyond wrestling.

## **Chapter Four: Knowledge is Critical**

Coach Gums understood that developing a thirst for knowledge was critical for his wrestlers' growth and success. He knew that wrestlers who were curious, passionate, and eager to learn were more likely to achieve their goals.

To help his wrestlers develop a thirst for knowledge, Coach Gums encouraged them to ask questions and seek answers to their queries. He made sure to create a supportive environment where his wrestlers felt comfortable asking questions and exploring new ideas.

He also introduced them to different resources, such as books, videos, and articles, that would help them improve their wrestling skills and knowledge. Coach Gums would often assign reading materials and discuss them with his wrestlers, encouraging them to share their insights and opinions.

Coach Gums also emphasized the importance of learning from other wrestlers and coaches. He encouraged his wrestlers to watch other teammates wrestling matches, while attending tournaments help other teammates, and observe other wrestlers' techniques and styles. He also made sure to invite guest coaches to provide his wrestlers with new perspectives and insights.

As the season progressed, Coach Gums saw his wrestlers develop a thirst for knowledge. They were curious and eager to learn, often seeking out new resources and opportunities to improve their skills. They were not satisfied with their current level of knowledge and constantly sought ways to expand their understanding of the sport.

Coach Gums knew that developing a thirst for knowledge was critical for his wrestlers' success. By encouraging them to ask questions, explore new ideas, and learn from others, he had created a culture of continuous learning and growth. His wrestlers had not only become better wrestlers but also better learners, equipped with the skills and mindset to succeed both on and off the mat.

Coach Gums gathered his wrestlers and shared a book he had just finished reading called Dan Gables book "Conditioning for Wrestling" He explained that the book was about the mindset and habits necessary for achieving success in any area of life, including wrestling. Today, I would suggest Chop Wood and Carry Water is a simple Zen proverb that emphasizes the importance of hard work, dedication, and mindfulness in achieving our goals. The proverb suggests that no matter how lofty our ambitions may be, we must start with the basics and focus on the present moment, doing what needs to be done, step by step, with patience and perseverance. In essence, it's a reminder to stay grounded, stay focused on the task at hand, and enjoy the process, rather than being fixated on the end goal.

Coach Gums summarized some of the key points of the book, emphasizing the importance of focusing on the process rather than the outcome. He explained that success was not just about winning matches or championships, but about the daily habits and routines that led to those victories.

## Jon Gums – Life Lessons for Wrestlers

He also emphasized the importance of having a growth mindset, being willing to learn from mistakes and failures, and being persistent in the face of challenges and setbacks.

Coach Gums shared with his wrestlers how the book and camps he attended had inspired him to become a better coach and mentor. He promised them that he would continue to help them develop the habits and mindset necessary for success both on and off the mat.

Coach Gums' wrestlers left the meeting feeling motivated and inspired. They had learned a lot throughout the season and had developed the skills and mindset necessary for success. They were grateful for their coach's guidance and looked forward to the next season, eager to continue their journey of growth and improvement.

## Chapter Five: Learn from Losses

As the wrestling season continued, Coach Gums noticed that some of his wrestlers were struggling with losses and setbacks. They were disappointed with their performance and were finding it challenging to bounce back from their losses. Coach Gums knew that developing the ability to embrace humility was critical for his wrestlers' growth and resilience, so he decided to teach them a lesson about it.

One day, Coach Gums gathered his wrestlers and shared a story about his own wrestling career. “I was not a successful wrestler, but I dreamt of being a great one. I never knew I had a calling to be a wrestling coach.” He talked about a match he had lost in his senior year of high school. At the time, he had felt devastated and embarrassed, but looking back, he realized that the loss had been a valuable lesson in humility.

Coach Gums explained that embracing humility was about being willing to learn from mistakes and failures. It was about recognizing that nobody was perfect and that there was always room for improvement. Coach Gums, “Being humble did not mean being weak or lacking confidence, but rather being open-minded and willing to accept feedback and guidance.”

To help his wrestlers develop humility, Coach Gums encouraged them to reflect on their losses and setbacks. He encouraged them to identify the areas where they needed to improve and to seek out feedback and guidance from coaches and teammates. He also reminded them that setbacks and failures were a natural part of the learning process and that it was essential to embrace them and learn from them.

Over time, Coach Gums saw his wrestlers develop a greater sense of humility. They were more open to feedback, more willing to learn from mistakes, and more resilient in the face of setbacks and losses. They had learned that humility was not a weakness but a strength, a vital component of being a successful wrestler and a successful person.

Coach Gums knew that embracing humility was critical for his wrestlers' growth and development. By teaching them the value of humility and encouraging them to learn from mistakes and setbacks, he had equipped them with the mindset and skills necessary for success both on and off the mat.

As wrestlers trust in coach Gums gained strengthened, they started to ask more valuable questions. A wrestler then asked, “Coach how should you react when you lose a match?” Losing a match can be a difficult and disappointing experience, but it is an inevitable part of any sport. How you react to a loss can have a significant impact on your growth and development as an athlete. Here are some tips on how to react when you lose a match:

1. Allow yourself to feel your emotions: It is natural to feel disappointed, frustrated, or upset after losing a match. Allow yourself to feel those emotions and acknowledge them.
2. Take a deep breath: Take a deep breath and try to calm yourself down. Taking a moment to compose yourself can help you process your emotions and regain your focus.

3. Reflect on the match: Reflect on the match and try to identify the areas where you could have done better. Take note of what worked well and what did not and think about how you can improve for the next match.
4. Learn from the experience: Losing a match can be a valuable learning experience. Use it as an opportunity to identify your weaknesses and work on them. Seek feedback from your coach and teammates and use their insights to improve your skills and strategy.
5. Keep a positive attitude: Maintaining a positive attitude is critical when dealing with a loss. Remember that setbacks and failures are a natural part of the learning process and that every match is an opportunity to learn and grow.
6. Move on: Once you have reflected on the match and learned from the experience, it is essential to move on. Dwelling on a loss can be counterproductive and can harm your confidence and motivation. Instead, focus on the next match and use what you have learned to improve your performance.

Losing a match can be a challenging experience, but it is essential to react to it with a positive mindset and a willingness to learn and grow. With the right attitude and approach, a loss can be a valuable opportunity for growth and improvement.

Another question came up in this same conversation with the team, “How do you congratulate your opponent, the person you want to beat so bad?”

Coach Gums said, “Congratulating your opponent after a loss can be a difficult but essential part of being a gracious and respectful athlete.”

Here are some tips on how to do it:

1. Take a moment to compose yourself: Losing a match can be an emotional experience, so take a moment to compose yourself before approaching your opponent.
2. Approach your opponent with respect: Approach your opponent with a respectful and positive attitude. Thank them for the match and for the opportunity to compete.
3. Be gracious in defeat: Even if you are disappointed with the outcome, be gracious in defeat. Congratulate your opponent on their performance and acknowledge their strengths.
4. Avoid making excuses: Avoid making excuses or blaming external factors for your loss. Instead, take responsibility for your performance and use the experience as a learning opportunity.
5. Offer to shake hands or at least fist bump: Offer to shake hands or fist bump with your opponent as a sign of respect and sportsmanship.
6. End on a positive note: End the conversation on a positive note. Wish your opponent good luck in their future matches and thank them again for the opportunity to compete.

In conclusion, congratulating your opponent after a loss can be challenging, but it is an essential part of being a gracious and respectful athlete. By approaching your opponent with respect, being gracious in defeat, and ending on a positive note, you can show that you value sportsmanship and respect your opponent's performance.

## Chapter 6: Setting Goals

Setting goals and tracking progress is a crucial aspect of any athlete's training and development, and maybe addressed kind of late in this story but Coach Gums recognized this from the very beginning of his coaching career. He emphasizes the importance of goal setting and progress tracking for wrestlers and used his assistant coaches to help track all stats and opponents.

Coach Gums, “Setting clear and specific goals is essential for athletes to have a sense of direction and purpose in their training.” He encouraged wrestlers to set both short-term and long-term goals, and to make them challenging yet attainable. He also suggests that wrestlers should write down their goals and keep them visible, such as on a bulletin board or in a journal, to remind themselves of their objectives and stay motivated. “Do this before day 1 and everyday write down what you need to do and did.”

In addition to setting goals, Coach Gums stressed the importance of tracking progress. He encourages wrestlers to keep a record of their performance, including wins and losses, as well as their training progress, such as improvements in strength, speed, conditioning, and technique. By tracking progress, athletes can identify areas of improvement, measure their growth and development, and stay accountable to their goals.

Coach Gums also recommended that wrestlers share their goals with their coaches and teammates, as this can help them stay accountable and receive support and feedback. He believes that goal setting and progress tracking are not only essential for individual athletes but can also benefit the team as a whole by creating a culture of accountability and motivation.

Having an accountability partner means having someone who holds you responsible for your actions, goals, and commitments. This person is someone you trust and respect, and who is committed to helping you achieve your objectives. An accountability partner can be a friend, teammate, coach, or mentor, and their role is to keep you focused, motivated, and on track. They can provide you with support, encouragement, and feedback, as well as help you identify and overcome obstacles and challenges. Having an accountability partner can be particularly helpful when working towards personal or wrestling goals, as they can help you stay committed, consistent, and accountable for your actions and decisions.

Coach Gums emphasized the importance of goal setting and progress tracking for wrestlers. As part of this process, he provides his wrestlers with preseason goal setting sheets, which help them identify their goals for the upcoming season.

The preseason goal setting sheets typically include questions such as:

- What are your overall goals for the season?
- What specific skills or techniques do you want to improve?
- What areas of your performance do you want to focus on?
- How will you measure your progress towards your goals?
- What steps will you take to achieve your goals?

After the wrestlers complete the goal setting sheets, Coach Gums and assistants evaluate them with his wrestlers. He discusses each wrestler's goals and offers feedback and guidance on how to make them more specific, measurable, and achievable. He also helps wrestlers prioritize their goals, identify potential obstacles, and create action plans to achieve their objectives.

Coach Gums believed that this process of goal setting and evaluation is essential for wrestlers to have a sense of direction and purpose in their training. By identifying their goals, wrestlers can stay motivated, focused, and accountable to their objectives. By evaluating their goals with their coach, wrestlers can receive feedback, support, and guidance on how to achieve their objectives and overcome challenges.

In conclusion, preseason goal setting sheets are a valuable tool for wrestlers to identify their goals and create a plan to achieve them. By evaluating these goals with their coaches, wrestlers can receive feedback, guidance, and support on how to achieve their objectives and overcome challenges. This process can help wrestlers stay motivated, focused, and accountable to their goals, and ultimately improve their performance on the mat.

## **Chapter 7: Self Reflection**

Coach Gums discussed the importance of self-reflection in the training and development of wrestlers. He explained that self-reflection involves taking the time to think critically about one's performance, identifying areas of improvement, and creating a plan to address these areas.

To facilitate self-reflection, Coach Gums encouraged his wrestlers to review their performance after each match or practice session. He suggests that they ask themselves questions such as:

- What did I do well?
- What could I have done better?
- What did I learn from this experience?
- How can I apply what I learned to my future training?

Coach Gums, “If you can’t be honest with yourself who can you be honest with?” he emphasized the importance of being honest with oneself during self-reflection. He encourages his wrestlers to identify both their strengths and weaknesses, and to take responsibility for their mistakes and areas of improvement.

In addition to self-reflection after practice or matches, Coach Gums also encouraged his wrestlers to set aside time for regular self-reflection. He suggests that wrestlers should review their progress towards their goals, identify areas of improvement, and create action plans to address these areas.

Coach Gums believed that self-reflection is a critical component of an athlete's training and development. By taking the time to reflect on their performance, wrestlers can identify areas of improvement, learn from their mistakes, and create a plan to address these areas. This process can help wrestlers stay motivated, focused, and accountable to their goals, and ultimately improve their performance on the mat.

Self-reflection is an essential aspect of a wrestler's training and development, and Coach Gums emphasized its importance. By encouraging his wrestlers to review their performance, identify areas of improvement, and create action plans to address these areas, he helps them stay focused, motivated, and accountable to their goals.

Writing down self-reflections is highly beneficial for athletes as it can help to clarify thoughts and provide a record of progress over time. By writing down their reflections, athletes are better able to track their progress, identify patterns in their performance, and monitor their growth over time.

Writing down self-reflections also allows athletes to be more intentional and specific about their goals and areas of improvement. It helps them to organize their thoughts and create a plan of action for addressing their weaknesses and building on their strengths.

In addition, writing down self-reflections can help athletes to stay accountable to their goals. By regularly reviewing their written reflections, athletes can stay focused and motivated towards achieving their objectives.

## **Chapter 8: Four Life Lessons**

As Coach Gums sat with his team after a tough practice, he could see the exhaustion etched on their faces. He knew that the boys were physically and mentally drained, but he also knew that they were learning some valuable lessons that would stay with them for a lifetime. He took a deep breath and began to share his thoughts.

"Guys, I know that this season has been tough on all of you, but I want you to know that you are learning some important lessons through your hard work and dedication to this sport. Wrestling teaches us so much more than just how to pin our opponents. It teaches us about confidence, pride, leadership, and mental toughness." Someday some of you will look back and say "Wow we did that."

The boys listened intently as Coach Gums began to explain each lesson in detail.

"Confidence is not just about believing in yourself, but it's also about having the courage to take risks and the resilience to bounce back from failures. Wrestling teaches us that we are capable of achieving great things if we have the confidence to push ourselves beyond our limits."

"Pride is not just about being proud of your accomplishments, but it's also about having the discipline to work hard every day and the humility to recognize that there is always room for improvement. Wrestling teaches us that pride comes from knowing that we have given our best effort, regardless of the outcome."

"Leadership is not just about being in charge, but it's also about setting a good example for others and being willing to take responsibility for our actions. Wrestling teaches us that we can all be leaders, whether it's on the mat or in our daily lives."

"Mental toughness is not just about being physically strong, Shannon Johnson, but it's also about having the mental fortitude to push through challenges and setbacks. Wrestling teaches us that mental toughness comes from developing a growth mindset, embracing challenges, and being willing to learn from our mistakes."

The boys nodded their heads in agreement, and Coach Gums smiled. He knew that they were beginning to understand the true value of wrestling and the lessons that it taught them. He hoped that these lessons would stay with them long after they left the mat and that they would carry them into all aspects of their lives.

Expanding on these lesson coach Gums was instilling.

Firstly, wrestling teaches confidence. As wrestlers improve their skills and win matches, they gain confidence in their abilities. This confidence can translate into other areas of life, helping wrestlers to take on challenges with a greater sense of self-assurance.

Wrestling is a sport that demands a high level of skill, strength, and agility. It requires intense training and discipline to master the necessary techniques and succeed in competition. As wrestlers improve their skills and win matches, they gain confidence in their abilities.

Confidence is a crucial element of success in any endeavor, including sports. In wrestling, confidence can be the difference between winning and losing. When wrestlers believe in their abilities and have confidence in their techniques, they are more likely to perform at their best and achieve their goals.

As wrestlers progress in their training and competition, they develop a sense of self-assurance and belief in their abilities. They learn to trust their instincts and make quick decisions on the mat. This confidence can translate into other areas of life as well, helping wrestlers to take on challenges with a greater sense of self-assurance.

Confidence is also important for mental and emotional well-being. When wrestlers feel confident in their abilities, they are less likely to be intimidated by their opponents or overwhelmed by the pressure of competition. They can approach matches with a sense of calm and focus, which can help them perform better and enjoy the experience more.

Overall, wrestling teaches confidence through the process of skill development, training, and competition. As wrestlers work hard and see progress in their abilities, they gain a sense of self-assurance and belief in their abilities. This confidence can help them succeed in wrestling and beyond, in all areas of their lives.

Secondly, wrestling teaches pride. Through the hard work and dedication required to succeed in wrestling, wrestlers can take pride in their accomplishments and the progress they have made. This pride can fuel further motivation and success.

In wrestling, pride is a natural byproduct of hard work and dedication. Wrestlers who put in the time and effort to improve their skills and fitness levels take pride in their accomplishments and the progress they have made.

Wrestling is a physically demanding sport that requires athletes to push their bodies to the limit. This can be a challenging and often grueling process, but it can also be incredibly rewarding. As wrestlers see their hard work pay off in terms of improved strength, agility, and technique, they feel a sense of pride in their achievements.

This pride can fuel further motivation and success. When wrestlers take pride in their accomplishments, they are more likely to continue working hard to achieve their goals. They feel a sense of ownership over their successes and are motivated to keep improving and pushing themselves to new levels.

In addition to personal pride, wrestling also fosters a sense of pride in team accomplishments. Wrestlers train and compete as part of a team, and when the team succeeds, every member feels a sense of pride in their shared achievement. This sense of pride can help create a strong team culture and a sense of camaraderie among team members.

Beyond wrestling, the pride that wrestlers develop through their training and competition can be carried into other areas of life as well. When individuals feel proud of their accomplishments and have a sense of ownership over their successes, they are more likely to be motivated to achieve their goals and take on new challenges.

Wrestling teaches pride through the process of hard work, dedication, and achieving success. Wrestlers who take pride in their accomplishments are more likely to continue working hard to achieve their goals and experience further success. This sense of pride can also extend beyond wrestling, helping individuals to achieve their goals and take on challenges in all areas of their lives.

Thirdly, wrestling teaches leadership. As wrestlers progress in their training, they may become leaders within their teams, inspiring and motivating others to work hard and improve. This leadership experience can be valuable in other areas of life as well, including school, work, and community involvement.

Wrestling is a sport that requires individual accountability and self-motivation, but it also emphasizes the importance of teamwork and leadership. Wrestlers are part of a team, and leadership skills are essential to the success of the team.

First and foremost, wrestling teaches the importance of leading by example. Wrestlers who consistently demonstrate good sportsmanship, work ethic, and dedication become role models for their teammates. This type of leadership is based on actions, rather than words. When wrestlers see their teammates putting in the effort to succeed, they are more likely to be motivated to do the same.

Wrestling also requires effective communication and collaboration among teammates. Teammates must work together to develop strategies, share knowledge and techniques, and provide support and encouragement during competition. Wrestlers who are able to communicate effectively and work collaboratively are valuable assets to their team and are often looked to as leaders.

In addition to leading by example and effective communication, wrestling also teaches other important leadership skills, such as decision-making and problem-solving. During a match, wrestlers must make quick decisions based on their opponent's movements and reactions. They must also be able to adapt to changing circumstances and develop new strategies when their initial plan is not working. These skills are essential for effective leadership in any situation.

Finally, wrestling teaches the importance of leading with humility. Wrestlers who are humble and willing to learn from their mistakes are often the most successful. They can recognize their weaknesses and work to improve them, rather than letting their ego get in the way of their progress. This type of leadership is based on a willingness to learn, grow, and improve, which are essential qualities for effective leadership.

Wrestling teaches leadership through the emphasis on teamwork, leading by example, effective communication, decision-making and problem-solving, and leading with humility. Wrestlers who develop these skills are often successful in wrestling and can carry these skills into other areas of their lives as well.

Lastly, wrestling teaches mental toughness. The physical and mental demands of wrestling can be intense, requiring athletes to push through discomfort, setbacks, and challenges. Through this process, wrestlers develop mental toughness, learning to overcome obstacles and persevere in the face of adversity.

Wrestling is one of the toughest sports that requires a lot of physical and mental strength. Mental toughness is a critical component of success in wrestling, and it is developed through rigorous training, perseverance, and the ability to overcome adversity.

One of the primary ways that wrestling teaches mental toughness is through the grueling physical demands of the sport. Wrestling matches are physically demanding and require wrestlers to be in peak physical condition. The rigorous training and conditioning required for wrestling help to build physical endurance, strength, and resilience. Over time, wrestlers develop the mental fortitude to push through the pain and fatigue and continue to perform at a high level.

Wrestling also requires a high level of mental focus and concentration. Wrestlers must be able to stay focused and maintain their composure, even in the face of intense pressure and stress. This mental discipline is developed through intense practice and competition, where wrestlers learn to block out distractions and focus on the task at hand.

Another way that wrestling teaches mental toughness is through the experience of facing defeat. In wrestling, losses are common, and wrestlers must learn to bounce back from these setbacks.

They must learn to accept defeat, learn from their mistakes, and come back stronger next time. This requires a great deal of mental resilience, perseverance, and determination.

Wrestlers also learn to overcome fear and anxiety. Wrestling is a highly competitive sport, and wrestlers must learn to overcome their fears and anxieties to perform at their best. This requires mental toughness, as wrestlers must learn to manage their emotions and stay calm under pressure.

Finally, wrestling teaches mental toughness through the development of a strong work ethic. Wrestlers must be disciplined, focused, and committed to their training and preparation. They must be willing to put in the hard work and sacrifice needed to succeed in the sport. This requires mental toughness and the ability to stay motivated and focused on long-term goals.

In conclusion, wrestling teaches mental toughness through rigorous physical training, mental discipline, the experience of facing defeat, overcoming fear and anxiety, and the development of a strong work ethic. These qualities not only make wrestlers successful in the sport but also prepare them for success in other areas of their lives.

One more thing wrestlers deal with: Eating right and maintaining a healthy diet is crucial in wrestling as it not only helps wrestlers to perform better but also contributes significantly to their mental toughness.

Firstly, maintaining a healthy diet can help wrestlers to maintain their weight, which is essential in wrestling. In most wrestling competitions, wrestlers are required to compete within specific weight classes, and being even slightly overweight can result in disqualification. By maintaining a healthy diet, wrestlers can ensure that they are within their weight class and avoid the stress of having to cut weight rapidly, which can be detrimental to their health and mental state.

Moreover, maintaining a healthy diet can help wrestlers to perform better during training and competitions. A well-balanced diet provides the body with the nutrients and energy required to sustain high-intensity activities such as wrestling. By consuming adequate amounts of protein, carbohydrates, and healthy fats, wrestlers can improve their strength, endurance, and overall performance.

In addition to the physical benefits, maintaining a healthy diet can also contribute significantly to a wrestler's mental toughness. Eating a healthy diet requires discipline, commitment, and self-control, which are all qualities that are essential for success in wrestling. Wrestlers who can maintain a healthy diet despite the many temptations around them demonstrate mental toughness and resilience.

Furthermore, cutting weight, which is a common practice in wrestling, can be mentally and physically challenging. By maintaining a healthy diet, wrestlers can avoid the need for rapid weight loss, which can lead to dehydration, fatigue, and weakness. Wrestlers who are well-nourished and hydrated are more likely to be mentally and physically prepared for their matches, which can improve their mental toughness.

Finally, maintaining a healthy diet can also help wrestlers to recover faster from injuries. Wrestling is a high-impact sport that puts a lot of strain on the body, and injuries are common. A healthy diet provides the body with the necessary nutrients to repair and regenerate damaged tissues, allowing wrestlers to recover faster and return to training and competition sooner.

In conclusion, eating right and maintaining a healthy diet is crucial in wrestling and can contribute significantly to a wrestler's mental toughness. By demonstrating discipline, commitment, and self-control in their dietary choices, wrestlers can improve their performance, avoid the need for rapid weight loss, recover faster from injuries, and develop mental toughness and resilience.

Overall, Coach Gums emphasizes that wrestling teaches a wide range of valuable lessons beyond just physical skills. From confidence and pride to leadership and mental toughness, wrestlers can develop important life skills through their training and competition. These lessons can be carried forward into other areas of life, helping wrestlers to succeed and thrive in a variety of contexts.

## Chapter 9: Stories

Serious stories of how not to become a state wrestling champion.

Coach Gums loved telling jokes and stories to his wrestlers. He tells many stories of great wrestlers who made mistakes that prevented them from becoming state wrestling champions, the ultimate high school prize.

The first story was about a wrestler who had all the talent and physical abilities to be a state champion but lacked the mental toughness to succeed. This wrestler was easily distracted by external factors a girlfriend, the crowd, the referee's decisions, and even his opponent's actions, which affected his performance. Despite his talent and skills, he could not overcome his mental barriers and lost crucial matches that cost him the chance to become a state champion.

The second story I remember was about a wrestler who was physically gifted and had excellent technical skills but lacked the discipline and commitment required to become a state champion. This wrestler had skipped practices, made-up excuses and neglected his diet and training regimen, which resulted in subpar performances during competitions. Despite his natural talent, he could not reach his full potential due to his lack of discipline and commitment.

The third story was about a wrestler who had the talent, physical abilities, mental toughness, discipline, and commitment to become a state champion, but he lacked the humility required to learn from his mistakes and improve. This wrestler was overconfident and believed that he knew everything about wrestling, he was called uncoachable, which prevented him from seeking feedback and advice from his coaches and teammates. As a result, he repeated the same mistakes in his matches and could not achieve his goal of becoming a state champion.

Coach Gums' stories illustrate the importance of mental toughness, discipline, commitment, and humility in achieving success in wrestling. To become a state wrestling champion, a wrestler must have the physical abilities and technical skills, but more importantly, they must possess the mental fortitude and the willingness to learn from their mistakes and improve. By avoiding the mistakes made by the wrestlers in Coach Gums' stories, wrestlers can increase their chances of achieving their ultimate goal of becoming a state wrestling champion.

### Contrasting Story

Coach Gums reminded his wrestlers that they are all human beings and that they are all capable of achieving great things, no matter their backgrounds or circumstances.

He tells the story of a wrestler who came from a troubled family and had to overcome many obstacles in his life. Despite his challenging background, this wrestler worked hard and dedicated himself to wrestling, and he eventually became a state wrestling champion and his family tree changed, wrestling truly change this future families lives as I have seen his boys also become wrestling state champions.

## Jon Gums – Life Lessons for Wrestlers

Coach Gums emphasized that this wrestler's success was not due to any special abilities or gifts but was the result of his hard work, discipline, and belief in himself. He explains to his wrestlers that they too have the potential to achieve greatness if they work hard and believe in themselves.

The story highlights the importance of having a growth mindset and believing that one's abilities and talents can be developed through hard work and dedication. By reminding his wrestlers that they are all capable of achieving greatness, regardless of their background or circumstances, Coach Gums encouraged them to strive for excellence and to never give up on their dreams.

## **Chapter 10: Gratitude, Trust, Character**

Coach Gums emphasized the importance of gratitude, trust in the process, and having great character as the last lesson he wanted to express to his wrestlers.

He explained to his wrestlers that while winning is important, it is not the only measure of success in wrestling or in life. He encouraged them to appreciate the experiences they have had, even the difficult ones, and to be grateful for the lessons they have learned along the way.

Coach Gums also emphasized the importance of trusting the process, which means having faith in the hard work and dedication required to achieve one's goals. He explained that success in wrestling, as in life, is not achieved overnight but is the result of consistent effort and a willingness to learn from mistakes and setbacks.

Lastly, Coach Gums emphasized the importance of having great character. He explained that wrestling, like any sport, requires discipline, perseverance, and a commitment to doing the right thing, even when it is difficult. He encouraged his wrestlers to always strive to be the best versions of themselves, both on and off the mat.

Overall, the message in this chapter is that while winning is important, the journey to get there is just as important, if not more so. By emphasizing the importance of gratitude, trust in the process, and great character, Coach Gums instills in his wrestlers the values and qualities they need to not only succeed in wrestling but also in life.

## **Acknowledgments**

I want to thank anyone who crossed paths with wrestling and found it to be a life changing thing!

## **About the Author**

My name is Jon Gums, I am Owner and Editor of Dakota Grappler. I have a belief that wrestling needs to be promoted because it changes lives. So, in 1999 I started Dakota Grappler and as of today, I am still promoting wrestling in ND and SD producing 35 books to highlight wrestlers and their accomplishments.... Keep promoting wrestling!