

# What to Expect as a First Time Wrestling Parent

BY MATT KRUMRIE | OCT. 12, 2017, 10:27 A.M. (ET)

Christina Young is the Membership Director for Oklahoma USA Wrestling, and the mother of 15-year-old Carter Young, a 2017 USA Wrestling Cadet freestyle runner-up and Cadet Greco-Roman national champion at 94 pounds.

She's watched a lot of wrestling over the past decade as her son has traveled the country competing in local and national USA Wrestling tournaments. Carter, now a freshman at Sand Springs High School (Sand Springs, OK), is also a three-time USA Wrestling Novice and Schoolboy champion.

Christina vividly remembers those early years, when Carter just started wrestling, at the age of four.

"I sat back and watched everyone yelling and screaming," Young said. "I swore I would never act in such a way."

But...

"Then my son went to wrestle his first match ever," she continued. "I couldn't control the emotion of it all. It poured out of me. I was yelling and screaming at my son, 'take him down, put your half in, and get behind him.' I could hear myself yelling and screaming, but couldn't control this new feeling of watching my son wrestle. I did the very thing I swore I wouldn't."

The reality is, especially for parents new to the sport, that wrestling is emotional. Wrestling is a series of highs and lows, and that can be in one match, let alone that first season. Everything is new—and that's a challenge. New coaches, new practice schedules and routines, traveling, long weekend days at tournaments, learning the rules, understanding how scoring works, and trying to fit in and be a part of the team, is all challenging.

"There is nothing like being a novice wrestling parent," Young said.

If you're a parent new to the sport of wrestling, consider this advice for first-time wrestling parents from other wrestling parents and coaches:

**Attend pre-season team meetings:** Introduce yourself to the coach and parents. Ask if there is a team handbook to help explain team rules and guidelines in greater detail. Be attentive and ask questions as they come up, in a group, or privately (one-on-one with a club leader, coach or parent).

**Get to know other parents/fans:** Parents and fans are truly passionate about the sport, says Chad Beatty, head wrestling coach at Forest Grove High School in Forest Grove, Oregon, and a former University of Iowa wrestler. Get to know those parents. "The best way to learn something new is from someone that is passionate about the topic," Beatty said. "Other, more knowledgeable parents can show you the ropes, explain rules, and answer questions that might not be addressed by the coaches at pre-season meetings."

**Get to know the coaches and athletes:** "Watching athletics is always more fun when you have a personal connection to someone that is participating," Beatty said. "Learn their names and cheer them on. This will do two things—create team unity and make tournaments go much faster!"

**Ask coaches and parents for assistance:** Do you have the right gear, or all the gear needed? Is there team apparel for sale? What should one expect that first practice, tournament, or match? How can a parent prepare in advance, and help the child prepare on and off the mat?

**It's about the kids:** Steve Thorpe, head coach at Sweet Home High School in Sweet Home, Oregon, tells parents the same thing every year. "It's about the kids, not me," he said. "I will never wrestle another match, but they have years in front of them if it's done right."

So, focus on learning what one can do as a parent to best support and encourage their child, regardless of knowledge of the sport. And remember, it's about the kids.

**Start out slow:** The first priority is to ensure that your son or daughter likes the sport of wrestling, says Justin DeCoteau, Kids Director for North Dakota USA Wrestling. Make sure they listen and pay attention in practice. Ensure they are doing what the coaches ask, and discuss progress with the coach as needed. Sit down with the child and reiterate that wrestling is a tough sport, and nothing comes easy, and ask if they have any questions or need help with anything. Do this during an unemotional time, such as after a practice, but never after a loss, or series of losses (such as at a tournament).

“You can’t make a kid love wrestling in a single practice, but you can sure make them hate it,” adds Thorpe.

Thorpe only wrestled in four local tournaments—all within a one-hour drive—the first few years of wrestling. He recommends parents take things slow, and ease into the sport. Get a feel for what it’s like to prepare, compete, and recover from events and tournaments, and don’t overdo it.

**Don’t compare your child to others:** Wrestlers develop at different rates. Parents new to the sport should realize, some newbies may find immediate success. Others won’t. Thorpe, who wrestled at Oregon State University, remembers only winning “a handful of matches his first three years in the sport,” he said. His dad was his coach, and even though he wanted his son to win, Thorpe’s dad “never made me feel like I was losing,” he said.

**Don’t be *that* parent:** Focus on being a supportive parent, versus a demanding parent. Young recalls those early years with Carter. “If I would have continued putting the pressure on, and taking the fun out of the sport in the beginning, I truly think he wouldn’t have made it this far,” she said. “Let it be fun. It’s a long road and you don’t want to take everything too seriously in the beginning. Every year he wrestled more and longer. We learned to not run, but jog, and then build to a sprint. Carter has been sprinting ever since. Take it slow and enjoy the ride.”

**Use technology to your advantage:** Utilize the educational resources available through USA Wrestling (<http://www.teamusa.org/usa-wrestling/coaches/educational-resources>). Watch videos on the USA Wrestling YouTube channel (<https://www.youtube.com/user/USAWrestling2008>) with your child/wrestler or husband/wife, or through Flo Wrestling (<http://www.flowrestling.org/>) or TrackWrestling (<http://www.trackwrestling.com/>). Listen to wrestling podcasts (<https://itunes.apple.com/us/podcast/bonus-points-usa-wrestling/id1014830298?mt=2>) and if one is really adventurous, read the most recent wrestling rules ([https://docs.google.com/document/d/1ZXYP9ZG\\_rFRH6hRglZMrAp8rtjn1yE1NxaOjl4w0dus/edit?pli=1](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1ZXYP9ZG_rFRH6hRglZMrAp8rtjn1yE1NxaOjl4w0dus/edit?pli=1)). Attend local high school or college matches, and follow those in your area, to help understand and grow knowledge and a love for the sport.

**Do your research:** In addition to competing for one’s local youth or high school program, many newcomers want to find a wrestling club to supplement training. DeCoteau recommends visiting a number of different clubs that may be of interest, or a fit. “Sit down with the coach and ask him what to expect at practice and tournaments,” DeCoteau said. “The coach should give you sound advice on what to expect.”

**Don’t base success on wins and losses:** Instead, focus on progress. There are countless stories of high school state champions, collegiate all-Americans, and national champions, who never won a match that first year. None. Zero. All losses.

“A wrestler new to the sport might not win a match the first few times out, or even the first year,” DeCoteau said. “But if they progress and improve, that should be encouraging. Expect highs and lows.”

If one isn’t experiencing success on a local level, don’t suddenly go to a large national tournament and expect results to change.

“Everyone develops differently,” Thorpe said. “Don’t take your child to West Regions or other huge tournaments and expect a trophy if they have not been having success locally.”

It can be overwhelming for parents new to the sport of wrestling. But be patient, open-minded, and understand there are going to be highs and lows and ups and downs along the way. Let it all happen naturally. When it does, that’s when being a wrestling parent suddenly becomes one of the greatest experiences of being involved in youth sports.

“It is addicting,” Young said.

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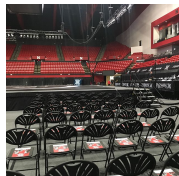
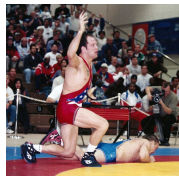
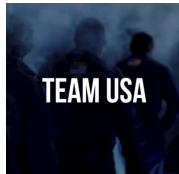
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