

WEIGHT CERTIFICATION AND WEIGHT MANAGEMENT

One of the most important issues facing the middle/junior high school coach in the sport of wrestling is weight control. There are many dynamics in regard to weight control at this age level that wrestlers in high school and beyond do not face. For too long, the wrestling community bought into the thought process that wrestlers should cut to the lowest possible weight because it was always better to wrestle one weight class lower than one weight class higher. Fortunately, sports medicine (body fat testing) and some good old fashioned common sense has slowly changed the way most people view cutting weight.

However, there are issues at the junior high/middle school level that must be addressed by the coach, the participant, and the participant's parents. Students at this age level are often growing and maturing during the season. Their body needs energy because of the physical maturing that is taking place naturally and then when they are told to "cut weight" it is easy to see that a problem will develop. Junior high students are all over the place in terms of physical maturity. Some are more developed than others; some don't hit their growth period until high school years; some begin as early as 5th-6th grade; some are naturally thin; some are naturally big; others participate in the sport for the first time and lose weight because they are physically active for the first time; others would like to drop a class in weight but their bodies are starting to mature making it almost impossible to drop to a lower weight.

Because of all the variables at this level of youth wrestling, the IESA made the decision in 2009 to require all wrestlers to meet "scratch" weight for all weigh-ins and do away with any type of weight allowances that wrestlers at the high school level receive. This puts a tremendous amount of responsibility on coaches to monitor each wrestler's weight and to be sure they are placed in a weight class that they will not exceed the maximum allowable weight. In essence, we encourage coaches, the wrestler, and the wrestler's parents to determine the best weight (given all the variables) at which the wrestler should compete. If a junior high student is physically maturing, it is not in the student's best interest to try and stunt that growth by forcing a weight loss to stay at a given weight. Rather, we believe the student should be allowed to move up a weight class, hence making scratch weight at each weigh-in. This removes the pressure of trying to maintain a weight that because the student is physically maturing, is impossible to attain. In addition, given that the first nine IESA weight classes are only 5 lbs. between each other, wrestlers really are not moving up too much by simply going to the next weight class.

Wrestling at the jr. high/middle school level must have the student's health and safety first and foremost in mind when determining the best weight class for a given individual. Healthy eating and a healthy lifestyle should all be part of the equation. If we are truly going to be concerned for a student's health then we should allow a student to physically grow during the time when students at this age level often grow the most. It simply does not make any sense to try and force them to cut to a weight that is not attainable. Rather, we should allow students to grow naturally, without the worry of cutting weight, monitor their growth, and discuss healthy eating and ways to manage weight. If they are growing, allow the student to move up a weight class. We do not need growth allowances because at this age level, we are in essence buying into the myth that we should keep students at a certain weight. If a coach knows that a student cannot make a certain weight, moving the student to the higher weight allows that student to continue to eat healthy, provide nourishment to a growing body, and removes the pressure to stay at a given weight. Coaches and parents have to remember that wrestling at this level should not be the epitome of one's career. It is a chance to learn the sport. Some will achieve success; some will not. Some will like it, some will love it, and others may never wrestle again after junior high. However, no one should risk the health and safety of a student. Weight management must be at the very center of all discussions when determining the weight class(es) at which one will participate.