

# Corner Coaching Tips

By Steve Fraser

Recently I polled my senior coaches and athletes asking them to give me some of their top tips on successful corner coaching. These dedicated coaches and athletes were quick to send me some great suggestions. I received approximately 200 tips and suggestions from around 20 coaches and athletes.

Here is a summation of what I received:

Most all coaches and athletes feel it is important to be very positive with corner coaching comments. All cited the need for a lot of positive affirmations before the match, as well as positive feedback during the match. **Rob Hermann** the 1996 Olympic coach says he yells comments such as "looking good, nice move, stay focused, keep wrestling". He tries to stay away from yelling specific moves because he wants the wrestler to be thinking on his own.

**Ike Anderson**, National Developmental Coach, suggests: "when you shout instructions from the corner, don't expect your athlete to physically look at you. This may break his focus and concentration. Realize that your wrestler can hear you without actually looking at you. Or you may want to train your athlete to periodically look to the corner during natural breaks in the match (out of bounds or injury breaks). Another thing you can do is train your wrestler to nod his head to acknowledge your instructions."

Other common tips included "knowing your athletes". Knowing what their technical capabilities are and what they want from a corner coach. Coaches should ask their wrestlers what specific information do they want to hear from a corner coach. Each of your wrestlers may want and need to hear something different.

Knowing your wrestlers pre match routine prior to the competition is very important. Do they like to be massaged and loosened up or do they like to be left alone? Do they like to be yelled at and pumped up or do they prefer quiet rational talk. Or do they prefer not to be talked to at all?

**Jay Antonelli**, the US Marine coach, states, "also knowing your athlete's opponent and stressing some of their weaknesses is a major help to most athletes. First of all, it instills confidence in the athlete about his coach. And secondly, it obviously gives some openings for technique and tactics."

**Les Gutches**, U.S. freestyle World Champion, states: "keep me informed on the passivity's and time left. Shout general things instead of intricate techniques. I.e.: 'pick up the pace, looking great, keep working, you need a turn'. If I am getting frustrated or something particularly irritating happens during a match (Such as a bad call or late takedown tying the match), remind me to keep my composure and cool. Only positive things from the corner coach no matter what -- including the body language."

**Dale Oliver** writes "a kid I used to coach was telling me about the guy who took over for me when I moved to Sweden. He said I would come to the side of the mat during injury

time or something, behind by two points or so and he would say to me, 'you got him right were you want him.' I would think what is he talking about\* I'm losing? He would say, 'he's getting tired, that single is working, you can take him down and get ahead and win!'"

**Matt Lindland**, 1999 Pan Am Champion, suggests some great tips: "Say everything in the positive. For example say, 'good defense or tough defense,' as opposed to, 'don't get turned'. Say, 'short arms, elbows in,' as opposed to, 'don't get arm thrown or watch the arm throw.'"

**John Morgan**, 1988 Olympian, says, "always use positive verbiage. For example, 'you're doing great. You almost had the underhooks. Keep working it.' Do not use negative language like, 'don't do that or stay away from such and such. This puts a sense of fear or uncertainty in your wrestler."

All athletes (with the coach's help) should have a match strategy. The corner coach, just prior to the match, can ask his/her athletes what their general match strategy is. This will get their athletes thinking of specific tasks or tactics that they will focus on. For example: getting your athlete to identify his/her "pace strategy" will help them to focus. Remember that all athletes are different and should design their own match strategy. Then when the coach knows their athlete's basic strategy they should coach to that strategy.

**Masaaki Hatta**, freestyle World silver medalist from Japan and NCAA champion from Oklahoma State, gives two perspectives: Coaches perspective... "All coaching should be done in wrestling room and far enough ahead of time. The coach at corner should be calm and confident with poker face. Show your emotion only if you think it will help the wrestler. You represent the confidence of your wrestler on the mat."

"It is important for the coach to focus on coaching and for the wrestler to wrestle, and to leave officiating to the officials, especially when they understand your language. Do not get the officials angry with you or it will hurt your wrestler. Make sure that your wrestlers wrestle and not worry about the officiating. One way to keep yourself and your coaching staff from irritating the officials -- encourage your wrestler by saying something like, 'good job!' Or, 'way to wrestle,' instead of calling points or being critical of their judgment. Say anything to make your wrestler feel better and it may make the officials feel good and encouraged too. Coach to win, wrestle to win and leave the officials alone (as much as possible). If they get so bad, you may have to formally protest for the future matches. But it is much better for the wrestler to win and not to protest. I know you will sometimes protest and you should when it gets very bad. Regardless my original purpose is to win.

Athlete's perspective.... "Do not depend on your coach in the corner. He cannot wrestle for you. But it will be helpful if he can tell the score and time."

**Coach James Miller** reiterates, "I believe that 99 percent of coaching should be done away from the corner. (Chance favors the prepared mind. -- Louis Pasteur). Therefore, corner coaching to me is a misnomer. I believe that once you get to the corner, the

coaches main role is to be a representative and at most supportive and positive. I would clearly discuss with the athlete what he believes my role in the corner should be before we get there."

**Dave Dean** , assistant coach at Michigan State, put it simply "in the spirit of being a good corner coach, I won't give much information at all. Go get 'em! (That's my tip)"

**Steven Woods** , a current athlete, writes, "I believe that the coach should not spend too much time discussing or arguing over a bad call. This seldom benefits the wrestler on the mat and in team situations it can hurt other team members. Instead of disputing a bad call a coach should help his athlete to re-focus and center himself."

**Wade Genova** of USA wrestling, says "do not antagonize the official by pointing out all his bad calls. It is better to be friends with him/her. Talk to your wrestler, not the official. If you want the official to put up some points for your wrestler, don't become confrontational with him; instead try to move him with the power of suggestion. You might start clapping your hands and talking to your wrestler, saying something like, 'way to go, good score' etc."

Talk to the officials after the match. Tell them what a great job they are doing. You may see them on the mat later. Read, *How To Win Friends and Influence People* before the tournament.

Keeping your instructions from the corner "simple" seems to be another common tip. Trying to communicate too much, or too complicated information to your wrestlers only breaks their concentration and focus. Remember.... Most coaching should be done in the practice room prior to the competition.

**Chip Bunker** , Napoleon high school wrestling coach (MI) writes, "One of the things I do in the corner is to keep a small notepad with me at all times. I jot down things my wrestlers need to work on. This way I do not forget them before we have an opportunity to go over them. I also have very brief, one word terms, that have been explained to them in practice. Often times, by the time instructions are completed (during the match) the opportunity has passed. I try to keep them short. I also try to know the strengths and weaknesses of my wrestlers to avoid asking them to do something that does not fit their wrestling style."

**Dan Chandler** , 2000 Olympic Coach, highlights the importance of staying calm. "This simple step helps your athletes stay relaxed" Dan also lists, among other things, "keep your athletes aware of their mat position. During a break advise your wrestlers of changes in strategy. Always, always keep track of technical points, passivity's and cautions on paper. And always have a towel."

**Darren Petty** says, "As a coach in the corner my philosophy is to meet the athletes needs, not mine. This is his match, his career, and his goals. In the practice room, is where my beliefs play a bigger role in helping the athlete achieve his goals. But in the corner it's a different story."

**Doug Reese** , head wrestling coach University of Minnesota -- Morris, says "ask the athlete what they want, what they need from you. Some athletes don't want too much information. They don't want to know too much about their opponent, so that they are focused on the opponent's offense, rather than their own attack. Other athletes want entire scouting reports. Everyone is different so it is best to know what your athlete wants, then try to work within his or her individual needs."

**Ted DeRousse** of USA wrestling states, "when two coaches are in the corner, only one coach should be giving instructions technically. The other coach should be keeping track of time, passivity's, cautions and the score etc."

So there you have it, a variety of tips from a variety of coaches and athletes. We must remember most of all, that we are all individuals with our own personalities and coaching methods. Knowing your athletes, and their needs, knowing your opponents and their weaknesses, being there for your wrestlers, with positive reinforcement seems to be some of the most common more important tips for corner coaches. One should consider these tips and blend them with their own coaching personality to be most effective as a corner coach.

Thanks' to the coaches and athletes who took the time to send me some great tips on corner-coaching issues.

Anyone who would like to be included on Steve Fraser's email resource mailing list, please send your email address to ([sfraser@usawrestling.org](mailto:sfraser@usawrestling.org)) Steve will keep you updated on the latest and greatest wrestling info from the USA Wrestling National office.