

# Put More Time Into Defensive Wrestling

## by Cary Kolat

I'm all for offensive wrestling and I want everyone I coach to put points on the board but I don't want to just win matches, I want to win championships.

The Europeans approach the sport differently and it gives them an advantage. We have trained ourselves falsely to look at defensive wrestling as a lack of guts, lack of hard work, even a lack of character on the part of the wrestler that chooses a defensive style.

I can wrestle any style I choose to wrestle. I can be on the attack, I can run the middle road and shift gears offense to defense, or I can be total defense. Most defensive wrestlers like to frustrate opponents and get them to force action and then capitalize on their mistakes with counter offenses. This is their game and this is where Americans fall short in international competition against the best wrestlers in the world.

Not that I like to remember these days, but when I was in college wrestling in open competitions John Fisher consistently beat me with a defensive wrestling strategy. John would sit back and look for mistakes while I continued to press the action. Each time I lost to him the bout was 1-0 or 0-0 at about the 3-minute point. Eventually I got so frustrated and tired that I made the mistake of forcing action. John Fisher was an experienced wrestler on the senior level and he understood defensive wrestling and how to use it to his advantage to take me out of my comfort zone.

Defensive wrestling or counter offensive wrestling, however you refer to it, is very important in high-level competition. This strategy will apply to all athletes with few exceptions, maybe John Smith (6x World Champion) or Satiev (9x World Champion) are extraordinary competitors with a total offense style. But even Satiev was beaten by Brandon Slay of the USA in the 2000 Olympics with Brandon's defensive strategy. In international competition on the open level this strategy must be studied.

Wrestler 1 spends: 80% of his time on offensive wrestling and 20% on defensive wrestling. He works on 50 different takedowns offensively and then your normal sprawl, stance, re-shot. Offensively there are so many attacks on your feet and set-ups that it takes years to master these and perfect them.

Wrestler 2 spends: 80% of his time on counter offensive wrestling and 20% on true offensive wrestling. He focuses training on defending the shot and then countering the attack. He spends this time on his stance, sprawl, and the other elements of defense, which are not as hard to grasp as the offensive positions. His offensive 20% is focused on the high crotch, double, single, and snap & spin. These are the same moves he will use in his counter offensive wrestling.

The elements of defensive wrestling are so much easier to master than the offensive elements. What if wrestler 1 & 2 are even when it comes to speed, balance and strength. If they both start wrestling tomorrow and prepare to compete against each other in 6 months, who will win? To be fair, let's say that wrestler 1 is only going to focus on 20 moves on his feet. Wrestler 2 has built his defense and focused his re-shots on the same techniques he used in his offensive training. So wrestler 2 can focus more time on wearing you down, frustrating you, defending leg attempts and reshooting.

How many repetitions does wrestler 1 have spread over 20 shots for 6 months? Has he really mastered all 20 shots? I don't think there would be a drastic difference between these two wrestlers and if they wrestled 10 matches I think it's 6-4 in favor of the defensive wrestler (it's my blog so I'm winning this argument) being all things equal when they start. If 3-2 represents the score of one match then you stopped one takedown in there during the bout and scored one more of your own on counter offense, winning the championship. Does it really matter if you win the World, Olympic, or NCAA title by a 2-point margin or one takedown?

How do you shift gears and build into both an offensive and defensive wrestler? You build offense over years, not in a season, not in months, and not overnight. If you learn to shoot a single with two set-ups then you have two single legs not just a single. Next season, you add three more set-ups and now you have five singles. You get the point and this is true for all your offensive takedowns.

When I created KOLAT.COM a friend who has more NCAA titles than me (I won't mention his name) said, "how does your single leg series have 75 clips in it?" I gave him the breakdown that I just gave you in the paragraph above and he understood. He already knew this but needed to be reminded. Wrestling comes easy to some of us and we don't think of it in terms of a different takedown with each set-up but that is truly what it is when you change the set-up or as they say, "there is more than one way to skin a cat."

This article is meant for those who are interested in aiming for the highest level of wrestling competition on a world stage. It will be beneficial to all wrestlers, but if you are attempting to become one of the best in the world, defense wins the championships.

Now don't read this blog and run out and change your training to 80/20 on the defensive side. But do take note and realize that defense is an integral part of the sport. If you are a beginner wrestler in the sport 80/20 might be a good rule for you to get started in the competition and then begin building your offense over time. If they can't score on you, it's going to be really tough to beat you!

Cary Kolat