



## **Steve Fraser: No Pain, No Gain** - September 26, 2011

As I contemplate our poor performance at the 2011 Greco Roman World Championships, I struggle with what we need to do over the next 10 months to reach our Olympic goals for London.

The two things that stand out in my mind are:

1. On the mat, the wrestlers who win are true “fighters” in every sense of the word. They battle for position constantly. They are on the mat competing and wrestling to make something happen. They are taking the game to their opponents. And the guy who out-fights his foe is usually the guy who prevails.

This requires physical conditioning at the highest level. Make no mistake of this. To win at this game today requires getting one’s body in outstanding physical condition and being willing to use every ounce of that conditioning to destroy your opponent.

2. Great Parterre is crucial to win as well, especially in Greco. In the 2011 World Championships every American Greco wrestler, except for one, got turned and gave up points during the tournament. Parterre defense is especially crucial.

Searching for answers, I picked up Mike Chapman’s book, “The Toughest Men in Sports – Looking for the Mental Edge”. Mike writes about some of the toughest men in sports such as Muhammad Ali, Dan Gable, Rocky Marciano, Jack Dempsey, Roberto Duran and others. As I read this book I realized some very important things.

Let’s take Dan Gable for instance. Let’s examine how this great champion was able to dominate, not only as an athlete but as a coach as well.

Mike Chapman writes:

“Gable stampeded through the wrestling world like a runaway tornado. And then the unthinkable happened. After 180 straight victorious matches, wrestling in his very last collegiate match, Gable was beaten by Larry Owings.

Some predicted Gable would fall apart under the pressure and pain of his first loss, but just two weeks later Gable won the national freestyle tournament and was on his way again. Gable was heading for the Olympics, non-stop”.

“He feels pain just like anyone else and he gets tired just like anyone”, said Jon Marks, one of Gable’s closest friends, “but the difference is Dan just never submits to it. He doesn’t ever quit, ever...”

“The individuals who really become champions are the ones who know that it takes considerable extra effort, substantially more than what the average wrestler is willing to expend”, said Gable. “The Olympic quality wrestler is the one who, in addition to his regular practice, works out every morning, who goes out and runs at least two or three miles before his day begins”.

“It’s the attitude of a champion that sets him apart from the others and helps him become a champion”, Gable says.

Dan Gable’s toughness and confidence came from his hard work.

Gable thought he was way behind most other wrestlers in ability so he decided that to beat them he was going to have to work harder than all of them. “I made up my mind that I would be the first one in the wrestling room and the last one to leave; that I would work out more than anyone else and with anyone that was available”.

Wrestling is mostly mental, according to Gable, once you meet a certain level of skill. However, Gable maintains that being mentally tough can only come from paying the price physically.

When I read this it became clear as day for me. Mental toughness comes from paying the price physically. Training harder than even the best wrestlers is the key to succeeding. Gable trained more than most everyone which helped him to learn the positions and all the techniques of wrestling. It helped him to get in tremendous condition where he would tire his competition out. And his great confidence came from all of the above as well.

As a coach Gable pushed his wrestlers to work harder than other college teams. “I work hard at making my team tougher by requiring them to expend an ‘extra effort’ during practice sessions. By having them work particularly hard at practice, we are not only strengthening them physically but toughening them mentally...”

When I observe wrestlers walking on the mat I know who is going to win – the one who is confident. There is only one legitimate way to have a lot of confidence – to be tough mentally, be prepared technically, and to be in superior condition”.

USA’s recent World Champion, Jordan Burroughs, exemplifies this!

It comes down to ones fighting spirit and attitude combined with true action in training and preparing. We can all ask ourselves a few questions to help tell us if we are on the right path to excellence in the sport of wrestling.

1. Are we willing – and in fact hungry – to find the toughest training partner that we can find, no matter who they are?
2. Are we really hungry for the ‘fight’ in competition? Have we learned to enjoy the battle or are we just in it for the win record?
3. Are we working out more than our opponents?
4. Are we sacrificing some of the pleasures of what the average guy enjoys in an effort to become world class?
5. Are we coachable? Are we in constant search for more knowledge and expertise or do we get to a point where we think we have it figured out?