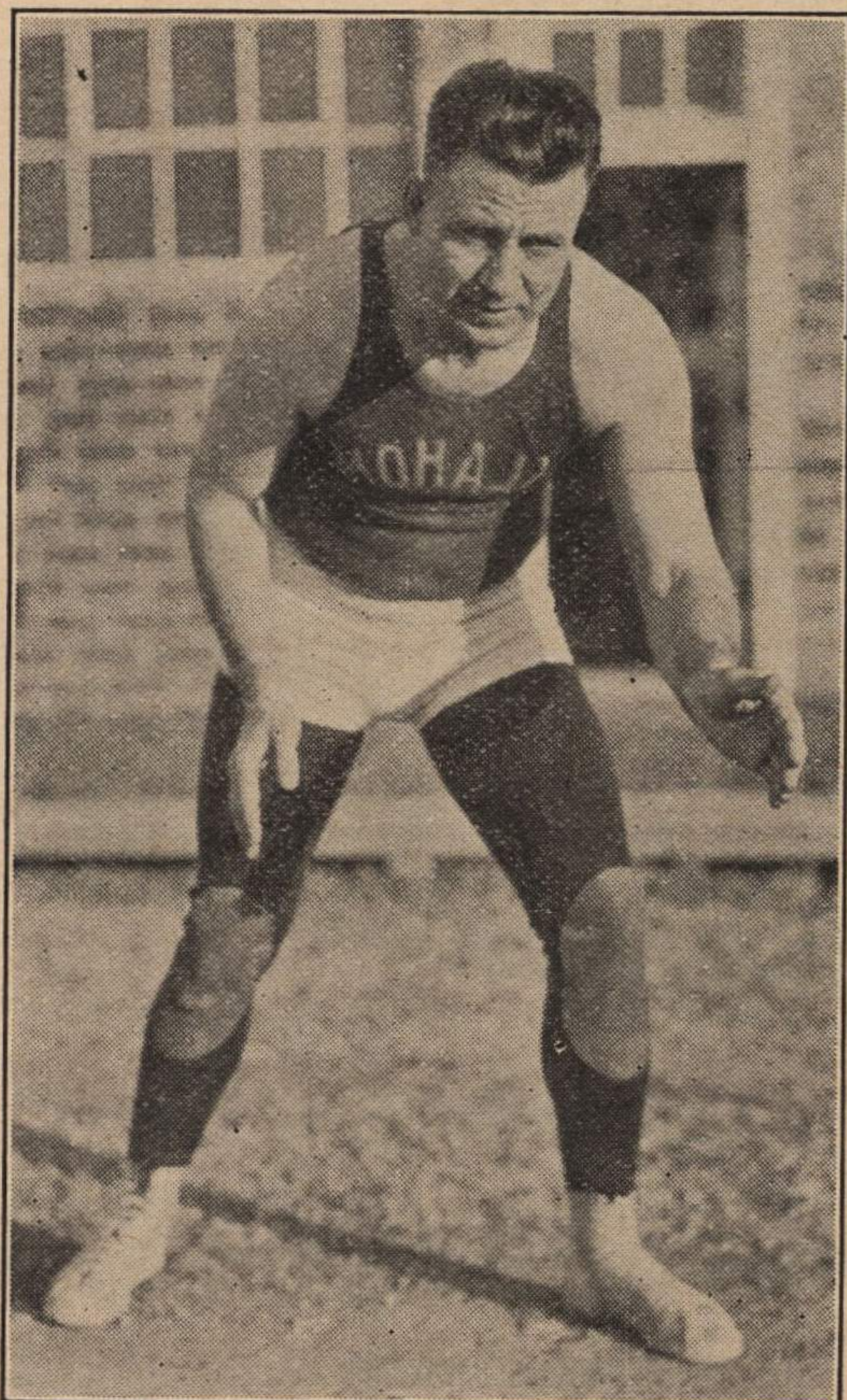


Training a Wrestling Team

By Paul V. Keen, Wrestling Coach, University of Oklahoma, and Former President of the National Collegiate Wrestling Coaches Association.

Coach Paul Keen's team won the National Collegiate Wrestling Championship last year. His men are always in top condition. Here he gives us some of the reasons why and they are certainly worth studying.



Paul V. Keen

It is just about as hard to tell how to coach a wrestling team as it is to tell how to rear your son, because there are just about as many complications and variations in wrestlers as there are men on your squad. Every boy must be taken as an individual and holds and combinations stressed to suit his particular need.

However, there are several things a Coach should do that have no particular bearing upon learning to wrestle. First of all, a Coach should get acquainted with every man on his squad. He should know their likes and dislikes, their habits, temperament, and social inclination. He should gain their confidence and let them know that he is interested in them and their wrestling.

In starting a boy or team off, the first few days or up to three weeks is spent in getting the boy used to the mat and how to care for himself. We give such exercise as tumbling, rope jumping, arm push ups and running.

The first fifteen minutes are spent in these warm up exercises, and until a man can take these exercises without feeling tired, we don't give him much of anything else. However, after he has taken these exercises for two or three days, we follow with some wrestling positions. First, I se-

lect two men about the same weight and strength and they pair off together. Then we show them how to face each other in a standing position. Then from this position, I have them try to push each other off the mat, or by making each of them cross their legs or by jerking one another to the knees on the mat. We do this until one wrestler has upset his opponent three out of five times or until both have worked at it a maximum of five minutes.

The next definite step is to teach a man how to get behind his opponent. We usually teach two methods. First, we teach a man to push up his opponent's arm and slip around behind. Then we show him how to execute the single arm drag. Then we teach them how to take the opponent to the mat when they are behind the opponent. All during this instruction, we coach each man how to fall and to protect himself at all times.

The next step is to show both men the referee's position on the mat and to instruct the offensive man how to hold his opponent down with one definite hold. I usually let a man ride his opponent for a period of one minute during this drill and then make him get up and start over again. After repeating this three or four times I ask the men to reverse positions and go over the same thing, with the fellow who was underneath now starting on top. The next step is to teach another definite ride or hold down combination and have both men carefully go over this second maneuver the same way and same length of time with which they attempt the first.

Now we are ready to try some defensive wrestling. The first practice is to teach the defensive man an escape from the referee's hold and have him practice going through it with his opponent purposely offering very little resistance, repeating this six to ten times. Then when the men reverse positions with the under dog starting on top and repeat. The men learn holds from both right and left positions or your opponent will soon learn that you can't work a hold from your "blind side" and he will beat you because of it.

After three or four good standard escapes are taught and two or three pin holds, the boys will be eager for a short wrestling match.

We like to start them off with three-minute bouts, gradually increasing them one minute each day

until soon they are wrestling ten-minute matches.

We concentrate on how to teach a boy to wrestle instinctively. He must learn to work a take-down, a hold, a ride, or an escape, until it becomes a reflex action with him. In order to do this each maneuver should be tried six or eight times when it is shown and repeated the same number of times for the next ten days or two weeks, so the boy will become familiar with it before he ever uses it in a match.

During the first three or four weeks of work, I have my men finish their day by running three miles in sweat clothes. They start by running a half mile the first day and increasing it a quarter of a mile each day until the three miles are reached. This serves two purposes. First, it gets the man in good condition and builds up his heart until he can wrestle ten to sixteen minutes at top speed. Also it keeps his legs and body more supple so that he can move faster and more cleverly.

After the first four weeks, I find my men in pretty good condition. Meanwhile, I have had time to find out what style of wrestling comes most naturally to each fellow, so I start in trying to help him build up the wrestling equipment best suited for that particular style, the feints, checks, take-downs, rides and escapes that best blend with it. In other words, I try to make each man become thoroughly acquainted with the machinery of his own style, to smarten him up in all its phases until through mastery of it, he becomes a wrestler formidable enough to win a conference championship or if his balance, speed, strength and knowledge is well enough developed, a national champion.

Here is a typical weekly schedule for a Sooner wrestler after four weeks of training already prescribed. On Monday take a light work out of about forty-five minutes and finish with a jog of three miles. Tuesday and Wednesday are about the same. Have the men warm up by tumbling, rope jumping, rope climbing, chin-ning, dipping, etc. for fifteen minutes, then have something new to work on for ten minutes, a new hold or a freak combination of holds. The next ten minutes can be spent by dividing the men off into pairs and having them go through holds that they know or are trying to know. Then have two men put on a sixteen minute wrestling bout. Let them rest for ten or fifteen minutes then run a mile or mile and a half, and go in. Make them take a warm shower, followed by a brisk rub down with a rough towel, and then make them habitually go through the training room to see that scratches, mat burns, or injuries are taken care of. Their work out should be timed so that each man rests at least one hour before eating dinner.

If a man has tender feet or feet that tend to become tender from running, paint them good two or