

# **Do you know why?**

By Steve Fraser (National Greco Roman Coach & 1984 Olympic Champion)

When up and coming wrestlers ask an accomplished wrestling star what it takes to become a champion, they usually are looking for the “how” they did it more than anything else. Not too many wrestlers ask “why” they did it. However, the “why” they did it is probably more important.

In fact, whenever I am asked how I did it...how I won the Olympic gold medal...I usually say, “it’s not about how I did it, it’s about why I did it.” I say this because without the why, the how would have been impossible.

I could easily talk about how I did it, and with that I would discuss issues that dealt with:

1. Ways of increasing ones wrestling skills and knowledge
2. Ways of conditioning the mind, body and your emotional state
3. Ways of surrounding yourself with good coaches and athletes

However, for the sake of this article I would like to focus only on the why.

The “why” deals with desire and passion, desire and passion to be the very best at something. I believe desire is the first and most important attribute one must have on the road to wrestling success. Desire is what ignites your engine. Desire is what gets you going.

Then there is passion. Passion is what fuels your fire. Passion keeps the flame burning even on the rainiest of days. If you do not have the intense desire and the fiery passion for wrestling success... then the “how” is ill relevant.

Did you ever have a moment where you were sick and tired of where you were at and where you seemed to be going with your wrestling career? Maybe even sick and tired of yourself? I remember one occasion in my career when I was at that point.

I had just completed my final season at the University of Michigan where I had finished my college career with a disappointing fifth place at the NCAA Tournament. My goal had always been to win the NCAA’s, however it wasn’t to be. Feeling pretty down and rather depressed I decided to take a short trip with some buddies of mine.

It was between my final NCAA season and the freestyle/Greco season when we jumped in my car and drove up to northern Michigan. We went to my friend’s cottage that stood on a bluff overlooking Lake Huron. We had gone up north to getaway from it all and do some fishing and relaxing. It was here where I started thinking about where I was going with my wrestling career.

It was late March and there was still some wet snow on the ground with a winter chill still in the air which was common for that part of the state. We were sitting on the beach looking out over the vast sparkling waters of Lake Huron. I remember very clearly how I began to examine my feelings about wrestling. I really took a hard look at where I was going and what I wanted to do with this sport. Did I still have the desire and passion for the sport? Did I still want to achieve something great yet? I remember thinking about this very hard.

I had been wrestling for nine years up to that point in my life. Wrestling had consumed most of my thoughts and actions during this time and not winning the NCAA tournament was a very big disappointment and failure to me. So...it hurt! It hurt badly!

As my buddies and I were just kicking back on the beach, I began to think. To myself... I began to think of all the trials and tribulations of my past nine-year career. Yeah...I had many failures...I had many set backs and this NCAA set back was big. Oh yes...I was feeling mighty sorry for myself. Then all of a sudden I realized my “why”! I realized why I was going to change my attitude and continue wrestling.

I was sick and tired of my old self, and it was time to change. It was not just a mental change; it was a change that came from deep inside. It was time for a big change and I knew I could change because I found out why I wanted to change. The following are some of my personal *whys*...*why* I decided to commit to the dream of winning an Olympic medal.

1. 1. I was fed up with feeling sorry for myself.
2. 2. I was tired of being just average.
3. 3. I was determined to find the answers to my questions of how I could become the best.
4. 4. I loved the thrill of victory and wanted to experience it a lot more.
5. 5. I was tired of getting beat, especially when I was not totally committed.
6. 6. I wanted to challenge my own self-doubts, my laziness, and my past.
7. 7. I wanted to be TOUGH!

All of a sudden I got the urge to get up off my butt, and in my combat boots, decided to take a run down the shoreline. I must have run for about a half mile when I started to think about how far I had come, with my wrestling skills, and with a tad more effort where I might end up. I also started to think about some of the victories and extreme highs that I had experienced in my career.

I knew I was pretty good at this sport and I thought to myself, why not really go for it? Why not give it everything I had...I knew I had to be close. Why quit now, when I was probably just around the corner from getting the true success that I deserved? Why not go all the way?

I thought to myself...the highs are so high, and it feels so good to succeed... this must mean that I still have the desire and passion for the sport. "Yeah (talking to myself)...lets go for it! Lets totally commit and see where this thing might take us (me)."

So... while running in my army boots, along the shoreline of Lake Huron, on that cold Michigan March day I decided to nourish my desire and passion for the sport of wrestling. I had my "why" which in turn allowed me to focus on the "how".

I learned years ago that *passion* is a combination of *love* and *hate*. Unless someone has the passion for something, it is difficult to accomplish anything. If you want something you must be passionate. Passion gives you the energy to your life. If you want something you do not have, find out *why you love what you want* and *why you hate not having what you do not have*. When you combine those two thoughts, you will find the energy to get you off your seat and go for anything you want.

**"Expect To Win"**