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Glossary of wrestling terms

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Common wrestling terminology for parents and athletes.

A Guide to Folkstyle Wrestling Terms

By Tre Horton

Wrestling has its own vocabulary. Coaches, wrestlers, officials, and experienced fans often use these terms without thinking about them, which can make the sport difficult to follow for someone new.

This glossary explains common terms used in folkstyle wrestling, particularly at the youth and high school levels.

A

Advantage

A situation in which one wrestler has a favorable position or scoring opportunity. Unlike some grappling sports, an "advantage" is not a separate point value in folkstyle wrestling.

Arm Bar

A pinning technique in which the offensive wrestler controls an opponent's arm and uses it to help turn the opponent toward the back. Folkstyle arm bars are control and turning techniques, not submissions.

Assistant Referee

A second official who may assist the primary referee during certain competitions.

B

Back Points

A common informal term for **near-fall points** earned by exposing an opponent's back. Under current NFHS rules, near falls can score 2, 3, or 4 points.

Base

A strong bottom position in which a wrestler supports the body, commonly on the hands and knees, while attempting to prevent being broken down or turned.

Blood Time

Time allowed to control bleeding during a match. It is tracked separately from regular match time.

Bottom Position

The defensive position in which a wrestler is underneath and being controlled by the opponent.

Bout

An individual wrestling match between two competitors.

Bout Sheet

The official record containing information and results for an individual match.

Breakdown

A technique used by the top wrestler to take the bottom wrestler from a strong base to the mat, making escapes and reversals more difficult.

Bridge

A defensive position in which a wrestler arches the body, usually supporting weight on the head and feet, to keep the shoulders from being pinned.

Bye

Advancement through a round of a tournament without wrestling a match, usually because the bracket does not contain a full number of competitors.

C

Caution

A warning issued for certain starting-position or procedural violations. Repeated cautions can result in penalties under the applicable rules.

Championship Bracket

The portion of a tournament bracket through which undefeated wrestlers advance toward first place. It is also commonly called the winners' bracket.

Choice

The opportunity to select a starting position at the beginning of a period or overtime segment. Depending on the situation, choices can include top, bottom, neutral, or defer.

Circle

The wrestling area marked on the mat in which competition occurs.

Clasping

Bringing the hands or fingers together around an opponent. Whether clasping is legal depends on the position and situation.

Consolation Bracket

The portion of a tournament in which wrestlers who have lost continue competing for the remaining placement positions. It is sometimes called the wrestle-back bracket.

Control

The ability to restrain and maintain a position of advantage over an opponent. Establishing control is fundamental to takedowns, reversals, and determining top and bottom positions.

Cradle

A pinning combination in which a wrestler controls an opponent's head and one leg, bringing them toward one another to expose the opponent's back.

Crossface

A technique in which a wrestler applies pressure across an opponent's face, generally using the forearm or upper arm, to control the head and create movement. It must be performed legally and cannot be used simply to punish an opponent.

Cut

To intentionally release an opponent from control, usually giving up an escape point so the wrestlers can return to neutral.

D

Decision

A victory by **1 to 7 points** when the match ends without a fall, technical fall, default, disqualification, or forfeit.

Default

A match victory awarded when an opponent cannot continue, commonly because of injury or another circumstance covered by the rules.

Defensive Wrestler

The wrestler who is being controlled, commonly referred to as the bottom wrestler.

Defer

To postpone positional choice until a later period or overtime segment when permitted by the rules.

Disqualification

Removal of a wrestler from a match because of a rules violation or accumulation of penalties. The opponent is awarded the victory.

Double Leg

A takedown attack in which a wrestler attacks both of the opponent's legs.

Dual Meet

A competition between two wrestling teams in which individual match results contribute points toward an overall team score.

E

Edge of the Mat

The boundary area of the wrestling surface. Under current NFHS rules, wrestling can continue when the required point of contact remains inbounds.

Escape

When the defensive wrestler breaks the opponent's control and reaches a neutral position.

Escape = 1 point.

F

Fall

The official term for a **pin**. A fall immediately ends the individual match.

Fall = 6 team points in a dual meet.

False Start

Starting before the referee's whistle or otherwise beginning improperly.

Fireman's Carry

A takedown in which a wrestler attacks an opponent's arm and leg and uses body positioning to bring the opponent to the mat.

Flagrant Misconduct

An extremely serious act of misconduct that results in immediate disqualification and additional consequences under the applicable rules.

Folkstyle

The style of wrestling commonly used in U.S. scholastic competition. Folkstyle places significant emphasis on establishing, maintaining, escaping, and reversing control.

Forfeit

A victory awarded when the opponent does not compete in the scheduled match.

Front Headlock

A position in which a wrestler controls an opponent's head and usually an arm while facing the opponent.

G

Granby Roll

A rolling escape or reversal technique commonly used from the bottom position.

Greco-Roman Wrestling

An international style of wrestling in which wrestlers may not attack or use the opponent's legs offensively. It differs substantially from folkstyle.

H

Half Nelson

A common turning and pinning technique in which the top wrestler places an arm under one of the opponent's arms and applies pressure to the head or neck area to turn the opponent toward the back.

Hand Fighting

The use of grips, ties, snaps, posts, and other upper-body contact to establish position and create attacks.

Headgear

Protective equipment worn over the ears during scholastic wrestling.

High Crotch

A common leg attack in which a wrestler penetrates between the opponent's legs while controlling one leg.

I

Illegal Hold

A hold or maneuver prohibited by the rules because of safety or fairness concerns.

Inbounds

A position in which the wrestlers meet the requirements for wrestling to continue within the competition area.

Injury Time

Time allotted when a wrestler is injured and the match must be stopped.

L

Leg Ride

A riding technique in which the top wrestler uses one or both legs to control the bottom wrestler.

Level Change

Lowering the body's level, typically by bending the knees, to attack an opponent's legs or react defensively.

Locked Hands

A common term for an illegal clasping violation by the offensive wrestler around the opponent's body or legs when the rules do not permit the hands to be locked.

M

Major Decision

A victory by a margin of **8 to 14 points**.

Major Decision = 4 team points in a dual meet.

Match Points

Points scored during an individual bout through takedowns, escapes, reversals, near falls, and penalties.

Match points are different from **team points**.

Mat

The padded competition surface on which wrestling takes place.

Mat Return

A technique used to safely return an opponent to the mat after the opponent stands while still under control.

N

Near Fall

A scoring situation in which the offensive wrestler exposes the defensive wrestler's back to the mat while maintaining the required criteria.

Under current NFHS scoring:

- **2 seconds = 2 points**
- **3 seconds = 3 points**
- **4 seconds = 4 points**

Near-Fall Criteria

The position required for the referee to begin counting toward near-fall points.

Neutral Position

A position in which neither wrestler has control.

Neutral Start

A restart with both wrestlers standing and facing each other.

O

Offensive Wrestler

The wrestler who has established control, commonly called the top wrestler.

Out of Bounds

A situation in which the wrestlers no longer meet the requirements to remain inbounds. The referee stops the match and returns the wrestlers to the appropriate starting position.

Overtime

The procedure used to determine a winner when the score is tied at the end of regulation.

P

Penalty Point

A match point awarded to a wrestler because of an opponent's rules violation.

Penetration Step

A forward step, usually involving a level change and knee penetration, used to close distance during many takedown attacks.

Period

One of the timed segments that make up a wrestling match.

Peterson

A common reversal and near-fall technique used by a wrestler from the bottom position.

Pin

The common term for a **fall**. A pin immediately ends the match.

Pinning Combination

A technique designed to expose an opponent's back and potentially secure a fall.

Potentially Dangerous

A situation the referee determines could place a wrestler at risk of injury. The referee may stop the action without assessing a penalty when the situation is not illegal but has become unsafe.

R

Referee

The official responsible for controlling the match, awarding points, identifying violations, determining falls, and enforcing the rules.

Referee's Position

The standard starting position with one wrestler on bottom and the other wrestler on top.

Regulation

The normal scheduled periods of a match before overtime.

Reversal

When the defensive wrestler moves from being controlled to establishing control over the opponent.

Reversal = 2 points.

Ride

To maintain control of an opponent from the top position.

Ride Out

Maintaining control of an opponent for the remainder of a period or specified time.

S

Scramble

A rapidly changing position in which neither wrestler has clearly established control and both are attempting to gain an advantage.

Seed

A tournament ranking used to place wrestlers in a bracket based on established criteria.

Setup

An action used to create an opening for an attack. Common setups include snaps, posts, fakes, and hand fighting.

Shot

A common term for an offensive takedown attempt directed primarily at an opponent's legs.

Single Leg

A takedown attack focused on controlling one of the opponent's legs.

Sit-Out

A bottom-position technique used to create separation and work toward an escape or reversal.

Snapdown

A technique in which a wrestler pulls or drives an opponent's head and upper body downward to break the opponent's stance and create an attacking opportunity.

Sprawl

A primary defense against leg attacks in which a wrestler moves the legs and hips backward while applying weight and pressure to the attacking wrestler.

Stalemate

A situation in which neither wrestler can improve position and continued wrestling is unlikely to produce meaningful action. The referee stops the match and restarts the wrestlers.

Stalling

Failing to make a legitimate effort to wrestle, improve position, or remain actively engaged as required by the rules.

Stance

The basic body position a wrestler uses while wrestling from neutral.

Stand-Up

A common escape technique in which the bottom wrestler works from the referee's position to the feet and attempts to break the opponent's control.

Sudden Victory

The first portion of the overtime procedure. The wrestlers begin neutral and attempt to determine the winner through scoring.

Switch

A common reversal technique in which the bottom wrestler changes hip position and turns into or around the top wrestler to gain control.

T

Takedown

When a wrestler establishes control over an opponent from a neutral position.

Takedown = 3 points.

Team Points

Points awarded to a team based on the result of an individual match. Team points determine the winner of a dual meet and contribute to team standings in tournaments.

Technical Fall

A victory earned by establishing a **15-point advantage** over an opponent.

Technical Fall = 5 team points in a dual meet.

Technical Violation

A violation involving prohibited actions or procedures defined by the rules. The appropriate penalty depends on the violation and the wrestler's previous offenses.

Tie-Up

A neutral position in which wrestlers establish upper-body contact and grips while attempting to create an offensive opportunity.

Tiebreaker

An overtime period or procedure used when wrestlers remain tied after sudden victory.

Tilt

A controlled turning technique used by the top wrestler to expose the bottom wrestler's back and earn near-fall points, often without attempting a traditional pinning combination.

Top Position

The position occupied by the wrestler who has control over the defensive wrestler.

Tournament

An event involving multiple wrestlers or teams competing through brackets, pools, duals, or another established format.

U

Underhook

An upper-body control in which a wrestler places an arm underneath an opponent's arm and controls upward around the shoulder or upper body.

Unnecessary Roughness

An intentional act that exceeds normal physical wrestling and unnecessarily risks an opponent's safety.

Unsportsmanlike Conduct

Behavior that violates accepted standards of conduct before, during, or after competition.

W

Weight Class

A competition division based on wrestler weight. Wrestlers compete within weight classifications established by the governing organization.

Whizzer

A common wrestling term for an **overhook**, often used defensively to counter an opponent's underhook or leg attack.

Wrestle-Back

A consolation match that allows a wrestler who has lost to continue competing for a placement.

Wrestle Until the Whistle

A common coaching phrase reminding wrestlers that action continues until the referee officially stops the match.

COMMON COACHING AND WRESTLING SLANG

These terms may not appear as formal rulebook terminology, but wrestlers and coaches use them frequently.

Backs

Slang for near-fall points.

Belly Down

A defensive action in which the bottom wrestler turns the chest and stomach toward the mat to avoid back exposure.

Break Them Down

A coaching instruction telling the top wrestler to destroy the bottom wrestler's base.

Circle

An instruction to move laterally rather than backing straight away from an opponent.

Cut Them

Intentionally release the opponent and concede an escape, usually because the wrestler wants another takedown opportunity.

Finish

Complete an attack after getting to an opponent's leg or another favorable position.

Go Behind

Move behind an opponent to establish control, commonly after a sprawl, snapdown, or scramble.

Heavy on the Head

Apply controlled pressure to the opponent's head and upper body to affect stance and positioning.

Hips In

Bring the hips toward the opponent to improve leverage, control, or finishing position.

Keep Your Base

Maintain a strong bottom position and avoid being flattened.

Mat Awareness

Understanding one's location on the mat, particularly in relation to the boundary, score, time, and match situation.

On Your Toes

An instruction commonly used to encourage forward pressure and active positioning rather than resting weight on the knees.

Pressure

Using body position, weight, movement, and contact to force an opponent to react.

Return Them

Bring an opponent who has reached the feet back to the mat while maintaining control.

Shoot

Attempt a leg attack or other penetration-based takedown.

Square Up

Turn and face the opponent to eliminate an attacking angle or prevent the opponent from getting behind.

Stay Behind

Maintain position behind the opponent so control is not lost.

Two!

A traditional crowd or coaching call asking the referee to award points. With current scoring, spectators should remember that a takedown is now worth **3 points**, not 2.

Work Up

Improve position from bottom by building from the mat toward a base and eventually to the feet.

Wrist Control

Controlling one or both of an opponent's wrists to limit movement and create offensive opportunities.

QUICK REFERENCE

Term	Meaning
Takedown	Gain control from neutral, **3 points**
Escape	Break control and become neutral, **1 point**
Reversal	Go from being controlled to controlling, **2 points**
Near Fall	Back exposure, **2, 3, or 4 points**
Fall / Pin	Immediately wins the match
Decision	Win by **1-7 points**
Major Decision	Win by **8-14 points**
Technical Fall	Establish a **15-point advantage**

Neutral	Neither wrestler has control
Top	Wrestler who has control
Bottom	Wrestler being controlled
Ride	Maintain top control
Breakdown	Take a bottom wrestler out of their base
Shot	Takedown attempt
Sprawl	Common defense against a leg attack
Scramble	Changing position where control is contested
Stalling	Failure to actively wrestle as required
Stalemate	Neither wrestler can meaningfully improve
Inbounds	Action remains within the legal wrestling area
Overtime	Additional wrestling used to break a tie

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