

How Wrestling Builds Better Football Players

BY **MATT KRUMRIE** | **JULY 21, 2016**, 1:20 A.M. (ET)

Tim Krumrie was known for his intensity as a football player and coach. Krumrie spent 12 years in the NFL with the Cincinnati Bengals, where he was a two-time Pro Bowl selection as a nose tackle that helped lead the Bengals to the 1989 Super Bowl. Prior to that Krumrie spent four years as a starter at the University of Wisconsin. In 16 years of college and pro football, he never missed a start. He was known for his toughness, tenacity, and technique.

He credits those traits to wrestling. Krumrie was 29-0 as a senior at Mondovi High School in Wisconsin, winning a state heavyweight championship his senior year (1979), and spent two years as the heavyweight on the Wisconsin wrestling team, where he placed fifth in the 1981 Big Ten tournament.

"Wrestling gave me the technique to succeed in football," said Krumrie, who went on to work as a defensive line coach for 15 years in the NFL after retiring as a player. "In wrestling, you are alone on the mat. Many times, I was alone against the center. I would play 60 plays a game in football. That's like 60 starts to a wrestling match. Each play is a new start, a new match."

As NFL training camps kick off across the country, former wrestlers everywhere are gearing up for another season of football, and another chance to use their wrestling background to succeed on the football field. Crockett Gillmore burst on the scene as a tight end for the Baltimore Ravens last year.

"Wrestling set me up for success as a football player," said Gillmore, who expanded on his wrestling background (<http://www.teamusa.org/USA-Wrestling/Features/2014/April/30/Welcome-to-the-NFL>) before the 2014 NFL Draft. "There are so many movements that are related in football. A big part of the game is technique, and I learned that in wrestling."

At least 18 NFL teams have an ex-wrestler on the roster. Many teams have multiple wrestlers. The Pittsburgh Steelers have seven ex-wrestlers. The Indianapolis Colts have four, including kicker Adam Vinatieri, and Austin Blythe, a center who was a 2016 seventh round pick from the University of Iowa who is from Williamsburg, Iowa, where he won three state titles and recorded a state record 143 pins during his career.

USA Football is the national governing body for amateur American football in the United States. Coaches and leaders with the organization see the impact wrestling has on the development of football players.

"Balance and control against an external resistance, leverage and positioning and the ability to move a non-willing opponent are skills needed for all football positions," said Andy Ryland, Senior Manager of Education and Training for USA Football said. "Wrestling does a great job teaching this."

The Minnesota Vikings have four wrestlers on the roster and head coach Mike Zimmer is a former wrestler. His dad, Bill Zimmer coached Mike in football and wrestling at Lockport Township High School in Illinois and Bill is in both the Illinois High School wrestling and football hall of fames. Zimmer talked about how wrestling helped him go the extra mile (<http://www.teamusa.org/USA-Wrestling/Features/2015/September/17/Going-the-Extra-Mile>) in athletics and as a coach.

"I think you learn more from wrestling than any other sport," Zimmer says. "You find out so much more about yourself and about competition. When it gets down to it, it's you and the guy across from you. When I was wrestling, for the six minutes that you're out there, it is one of the toughest, most demanding sports that I've ever been around. I think guys that can go through that and compete with all the different things going on, it really defines who you are."

Krumrie rattled off a laundry list of skills learned in wrestling that transfer to the football field. It starts with the eyes, he says, being aware of your opponent and focusing on their every movement. Hand control. Technique. Stance. Balance. Footwork. Endurance. Quickness. Strength.

"In wrestling, if you get control of the hands, if you get that inside step, you have the edge," said Krumrie.

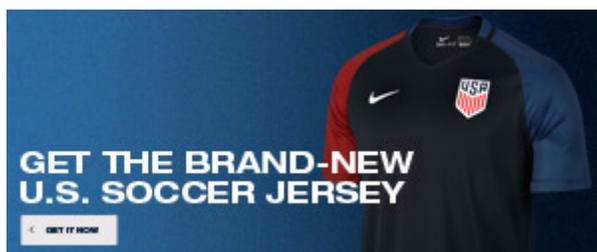
It wasn't just the interior linemen who benefited from wrestling either, says Krumrie. Skill players also use a wrestling background to their advantage. Green Bay Packers wide receiver Jared Abbrederis is a former wrestler.

"Look at everything a cornerback does," he said. "Tackling is about form and technique. Using your hands. Wrestling teaches that."

It also teaches something else.

"I can teach technique, but I can't teach heart," says Krumrie. "Every wrestler I ever coached had heart and tenacity. That was a given."

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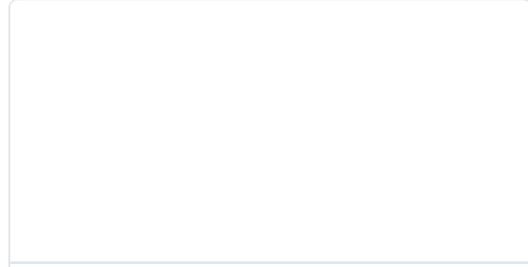


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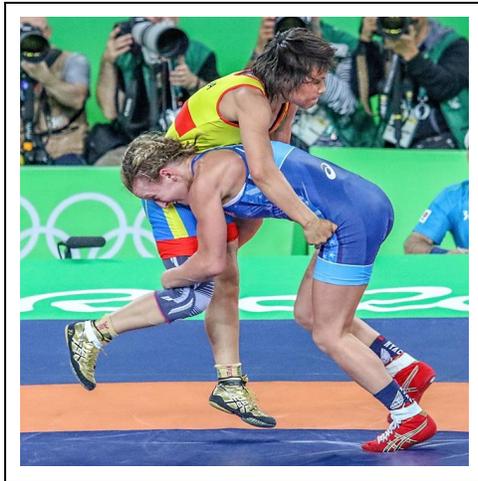
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