***FOOTWORK: AGILITY, QUICKNESS AND BALANCE DRILLS FOR WRESTLING***

**By Bill Welker, EdD**

 **Footwork is an important training aspect in many sports and wrestling is no exception. Footwork is an area of wrestling which is rarely given any in-depth attention. This article offers a sampling of the plethora of footwork drills that a coach can incorporate within his practice framework. Footwork should be stressed at the beginning of the season where conditioning is at a premium.**

 **The primary components to emphasize regarding footwork are agility, quickness and balance. They are key elements in becoming a more successful wrestler in the neutral position.**

 **Agility is the ability to effectively move fast when changing direction and positioning the body while staying under control. Closely associated with agility is quickness. Wrestling is a sport of quick movement, more so than speed. Quickness is the ability to move rapidly and energetically with physical dexterity. Finally, wrestling is a sport that necessitates the development of superior balance tactics. Balance is the skill of retaining physical equilibrium without losing one’s footing.**

 **The following 25 exercises will assist you in producing wrestlers who are adept in reference to footwork. They are drills that emphasize all three footwork skills: agility, quickness, and balance.**

**1. SINGLE-FOOT HOPPING DRILL. This balance exercise involves holding one foot behind the back, while hopping on other foot back and forth or side-to-side as instructed by the coach. This drill can last 15 seconds or until the wrestler loses his balance. Then do the same with the opposite foot. This solitary drill can be performed in groups or as a whole squad activity.**

**2. CIRCLE SHUFFLE DRILL. This agility exercise is a wrestling-specific drill to teach the wrestlers not to cross their feet in the wrestling breakdown position. Also, the coach would have them change directions on the whistle. Although a solitary activity, this can be incorporated as a whole-team activity during the beginning of practice exercises using the outer circle line.**

**3. WRESTLING BREAKDOWN SPRINT AND JOG DRILL. With the wrestlers in the breakdown position (neutral position stance), they will perform intervals of sprint and jog sequences by the coach’s whistle. Then on the coach’s whistle the wrestlers drop to the mat on their elbows and toes, springing back to their feet as quickly as possible to the breakdown position. This quickness activity should last 30 seconds to a minute. A whole squad solitary drill, it can be implemented during the opening exercises.**

**4. STANDING BALANCE CHECK DRILL. This is a partner balance drill where each wrestler grabs the other’s wrist with one hand while holding one of their legs in back of them with the other hand. The objective of this game-like activity is to cause your partner to fall to the mat. This drill can last 15 seconds or until one wrestler loses balance. Then do the same with the opposite wrist and foot. This partner drill can be performed at the end of practice as an intra-squad competition.**

**5. CRAB WALK DRILL. This solitary agility drill consists of being on all-fours (feet and hands). On the coach’s signal, the wrestlers move forward, backward, and from side-to-side. The activity should last approximately 30 seconds with the chest down; then do the same with the chest up. This drill can be initiated during the beginning of practice exercises or in groups.**

**6. TOE SPRING DRILL. This solitary balance and agility drill involves the wrestlers springing off their feet approximately 6 to 12 inches off the mat with legs slightly bent. Also, the wrestlers will have their hands locked behind their backs. At the coach’s command, the wrestlers will “toe spring” to the front, back, and side-to-side. This footwork drill can be performed during opening exercises, in groups or as a whole squad activity.**

 **7. ONE-FOOT STATIONARY BALANCE DRILL. This balance drill is performed with arms spread out to the side. The wrestler then stretches his free leg forward as straight as possible, balancing on the other foot. In this position, the wrestler will lower his body on one foot as low as he can go, and then straighten up again 5 times for each foot. This drill could be a group work or whole squad activity.**

**8. CARIOCA DRILL. This traditional dance-like, agility and quickness drill has been successfully utilized for many decades for all sports, including wrestling. With arms extended, the wrestlers side-step their feet (front to back) first moving to the right and then to the left on the coach’s signal. This 30-second drill could be a group or whole squad activity.**

**9. AIRPLANE SPRAWL DRILL. This partner quickness drill consists of one wrestler standing straight up with arms spread out to the side like an airplane. The other wrestler is in the breakdown position with his head an inch away from the other wrestler’s chest. On the whistle, the drill wrestler will sprawl back as the other wrestler is attempting a double leg takedown. The wrestlers will take turns in each position to see who is quicker. This drill should be performed in groups or as a whole squad activity.**

**10. SPIN TO BREAKDOWN DRILL. This solitary balance drill involves**

**the wrestlers spinning either clockwise or counterclockwise for 10 to 15 seconds with their arms spread out as directed by the coach. When the coach blows the whistle, the wrestlers stop abruptly and assume the wrestling breakdown position facing forward without losing their balance. This drill could fit into the opening exercise phase or in groups.**

**11. MOUNTAIN CLIMB DRILL. This solitary and stationary quickness drill in which the wrestlers begin on their toes and hands with stomach down. On the whistle, the wrestlers begin climbing their feet in place. On the second whistle, they stop. A 30-second drill, this could be a group or whole squad activity.**

**12. FORWARD AND REVERSE JUMP ROPE DRILL. This traditional agility and quickness drill involves the wrestlers jumping rope on the coach’s signal, be it “forward” or “reverse” change-of-direction commands. The drill should last approximately 60 seconds and performed as a group work activity. A variation would be to cross hands while performing the drill. Other variations could include single foot jumping or crossing your hands. Every wrestling coach should incorporate rope jumping into his conditioning program. It bests fits into group work activities.**

**13. SPRINT-IN-PLACE DRILL. This quickness drill is an off-spring of footwork drills found in every football coach’s practice plan. The wrestlers sprint in place, facing the coach. When the coach yells left, the wrestlers quickly turn to the left while sprinting. Next, when the coach yells forward, the wrestlers quickly turn to the front still sprinting. And finally, when the coach points right, the wrestlers quickly turn sprinting to their right. The coach should randomly choose the direction in which he wants the wrestlers to turn. This is an effective whole squad quickness drill that should last about one minute.**

**14. HIGH STEP DRILL. This solitary agility exercise consists of high stepping like the running back or offensive end football player. During this activity, the wrestlers will always be facing the coach. On the coach’s instructions, the wrestlers will high step forward, backward and side to side. The coach should randomly choose the direction in which he wants the wrestlers to turn. This is an effective whole squad quickness drill that should last about one minute.**

**15. ZIG – ZAG DRILL. This quickness and agility drill requires the wrestlers to explosively move forward then backward from left to right through a course of cones. The wrestler should maintain a low athletic stance while moving through the course. Once through the course the wrestlers can return from right to left.**

**16. CONE SHUTTLE RUN DRILL. This quickness and agility drill involves the wrestlers weaving between cones, picking up a block on the far end and returning to the starting point. To further motivate the wrestlers, you can time them to see who is the quickest. This is a great solitary, game-like drill that can be performed during a change-of-pace fun practice, timing who is the quickest.**

**17. LATERAL DISC HOP DRILL. This is a balance, quickness, and agility drill. Set up a row of discs leaving 1 to 2 feet of space between discs. The wrestler begins the course before the 1st disc on the right side. He then hops across the disc to the left side landing in the space between the 1st and 2nd disc. He then continues through the course hoping from left to right and right to left as quickly as possible.**

**18. STEP-UP DRILL. This is a quickness activity. Facing the gym bleachers, step up with the right foot and then the left foot, returning to the floor with the same foot sequence as many times as possible during the 30 to 45 second time period. This activity can be performed as a group or whole squad exercise.**

**19. LADDER DRILL. This is agility and quickness drill. Facing the rope ladder on the mat, the wrestler quickly steps between the rungs to the far side and then returning to the starting point. A variation is lateral stepping across the ladder. This activity could be performed during group work or as a whole squad drill.**

**20. AGILITY DOTS. Using five numbered dots in a rectangle shape with one dot in the center, the wrestler, starting on the middle dot, jumps to the dot number called out by the coach. This plyometric activity should be done in groups. A variation would be hopping on one foot to the appropriate dot without losing balance.**

**21. THE HOPPER BALANCE DRILL. One wrestler holds the other wrestler’s right foot in front of him at waist level. On the coach’s signal, the wrestler pushes and pulls his partner’s foot, attempting to make him lose balance. This is a 15-second drill for each foot, and can be done in groups or as a whole squad activity.**

**22. THE PLANK CIRCLE DRILL. This is an agility and quickness drill. The wrestler is in the up-phase, push-up position with hands in a fist. On the coach’s signal, wrestler starts stepping in a circle on his toes with his hands as the pivot point. On each whistle, the wrestler reverses direction. A variation would be hop-stepping on one foot. The drill should last between 30 to 45 seconds. The activity should be performed in groups.**

**23. THE LUNGE DRILL. This agility drill entails lifting up the right leg to waist level or higher and lunging forward or pivoting laterally to the right side. The opposite is done with the left leg. This activity can be performed by the whole squad during the exercises at the beginning of wrestling practice.**

**24. THE LONG JUMP DRILL. This is a plyometric agility and quickness drill. The wrestler jumps as far forward and quickly as possible across the length of the wrestling room. The less time the feet are on the mat the better. The activity can be performed as a group work or whole squad drill.**

**25. THE SCISSOR DRILL. This is a quickness and agility drill. With one foot in front of the boundary line and the other foot behind, the coach signals and the wrestler keeps switching his feet for 15 seconds as quickly as possible. A variation is hopping with both feet across the line. This activity can be performed as a group work or whole squad drill.**

**CONCLUSION**

 **As previously emphasized, footwork in wrestling has rarely been discussed in contemporary mat sport literature. But those in the know realize and have stated how important footwork agility, quickness and balance are in reference to the sport of wrestling. In fact, every wrestling coach from youth to the international level will benefit by incorporating footwork exercises into their practice scheme.**

 **The footwork drills introduced in this article are only a sampling of the plethora of footwork drills available to the coach. You can even develop footwork drills of your own to fit the needs of your wrestlers.**

**About the Author: *An award-winning writer and one of the country’s foremost authorities on Folkstyle wrestling, Dr. Bill Welker has published a national best-seller:* The Wrestling Drill Book*. Most recently, his novel,* A Wrestler’s Curse*, was declared the winner in the Sports and Personal Growth Categories by the Beverly Hills Book Awards judges.***

 ***A former Pennsylvania State Champion, Dr. Welker is a member of five wrestling halls of fame, including the Pennsylvania Wrestling Hall of Fame and the National Wrestling Hall of Fame (West Virginia Chapter). He has been named twice as the National Wrestling Sportswriter of the Year by* Wrestling USA Magazine*.***

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