

The Ride Home Matters

The most important conversations in a young wrestler's career rarely happen on the mat.

They happen in the car.

Whether it's the ride home from a tournament or the drive home after practice, those few minutes shape how young athletes think about wrestling, their coaches, and themselves.

After competition, it's natural for parents to want to discuss every match. After practice, it's tempting to question what was taught or point out what their child did wrong. But those conversations often have unintended consequences.

When parents criticize coaches, children begin to question the people entrusted with their development. If athletes don't trust their coaches, they'll struggle to fully commit to the instruction they're receiving.

Likewise, when every mistake is criticized, athletes become afraid to make them. Instead of trying new techniques, taking calculated risks, or challenging themselves against better opponents, they begin wrestling cautiously to avoid disappointing others. Ironically, the fear of making mistakes becomes the biggest obstacle to improvement.

The ride home should be a place of encouragement, not evaluation.

Let coaches handle technique.

Let practices and matches become learning experiences.

A parent's greatest gift is providing perspective and unconditional support.

Sometimes the best conversation isn't about wrestling at all. Sometimes it's simply asking if they had fun, what they learned, or telling them how proud you are of their effort.

Years from now, most wrestlers won't remember every practice or every tournament.

They will remember how they felt on the ride home.

Make it a place where confidence is built, trust is strengthened, and your child knows they are loved regardless of the outcome.

Because the conversations after wrestling often shape the athlete just as much as the wrestling itself.