

# I Had To Go There Every Day by Cary Kolat

Submitted by cary on Mon, 02/23/2009 - 21:01.

I recently had a forum question on the site and the question was simply, "How did you push yourself and achieve what you did, what was the one thing you did that set you apart?" I had to think about the question and how to answer it. There are many things that contribute to my success as a wrestler, but when I really thought about it I did something everyday that I believe is the one major contributing factor to my success in the sport! I had to go there every day in my mind.

When I was seven years old, I said I wanted to win the Olympics and when I was ten I began to train for it. There was not a day in my life all the way up to the 2000 Sydney Games that I did not think about winning a gold medal. Honestly, I think at the very least 5 minutes a day was dedicated to making this happen in my mind, so from ten years old until the Olympic Games I had over 31,000 minutes of my life spent visualizing winning that event by the time I finally got there and that is a conservative estimate.

We hear all the time you have to visualize it and see it in your mind if you are going to make it happen. I never did anything in the sport that did not involve me running through situations in my head that involve the Olympic finals. Below is my response to the question ask to me on the forum:

*When I was 7 I said I wanted to win the Olympic games. When I was 10 I really began to train for it in my mind. There was not a day in my life from 10 years of age until the day I stopped that I did not think I was going to win. Every day of my life the Olympic tournament popped into my head at least once a day with me winning it. Now, I still probably think about it everyday, what happened when I was there and that was 9 years ago.*

*Point to the above paragraph is this, and I try to put this in the mind of the kids that I coach. If you and I were in practice wrestling situations and I had lets say the offensive position on a high crotch and the coach yells out, "man with the high crotch is losing by 1 with 15 seconds left." Now, when he blows that whistle I'm wrestling in the Olympic finals in my mind and I really believed it. To many of my partners over the years they were training, and training hard, but mentally and physically I was training in a different place than them during practice sessions. They were in a high school wrestling room and I was on a platform in front of thousands of American fans waiving our flag. Would you simply be defending my attempt to score or would you be wrestling some where in your mind? That was the difference between me and my competition in the practice room and on the mat.*

*So, and like your statement, all humility aside I expected to win 4 state titles, I expected to win 4 NCAA titles, and I expected at some point be the best in world. I did not accomplish all my wrestling goals but I would have to say that what I did accomplish was because of the way I approached my training. When I trained I expected to win every takedown, scramble, situation, etc. because I was wrestling mentally in the Olympic finals and I had a higher training standard for myself than most of my training partners.*

*Every good wrestler works hard and pays the price and every great wrestler is a little crazy in aspects of training. The guys I wrestled with on the Olympic team were mainly a little crazy, obsessive, compulsive, and tolerated nothing less than winning. If you tolerate losing one takedown in practice then in time you will slip when it counts.*

When I was wrestling I heard coaches and sport psychologists always talk about visualization. Truthfully, they bored me most times because I never gave it much credit but apparently I was always doing this in the practice

room, during bike workouts, during matches, etc. I was always training in my mind and in my every day life. My wife, Erin, always thought I was a little crazy with the way I did things until she really got to know me. When we would come to my apartment steps in college I would walk up them backwards. If you have never tried to walk up steps backwards give it a shot. I did this because I thought walking up normally was easy but backwards it increased my leg strength and gave me a different awareness. And I thought that a new awareness might be the small detail that saved me some day at the Olympics. When I would pump gas into my car on a cold day Erin would say, "use the switch to hold the pump in place and get back in the car until it is finished." I wouldn't do it because I would stand there squeezing the pump handle working on my grip and I might need that grip in the coming games. If I could avoid an elevator or escalator, I'd choose the stairs every time. I never looked for the parking space closest to the store, I parked in the furthest spot possible. My point is I made the simple tasks in life as difficult as I could so I would have no guilt about being lazy. I tried to do those little things that my opponents would overlook which mentally made me feel tougher, better prepared and in my mind more deserving.

I did things like this all my life because I was training for it every day until I got there. This might seem really strange to some people but not strange to the .005% that actually wrestle in the Olympics.

Everybody has their way of doing things and my way might not be the answer for everyone or the answer you were looking for to the forum question, but I do believe it is what allowed me to accomplish what I did accomplish. When I was on my first World Team, Lincoln McIlravy and I were talking and I remember him telling me he worked out once a day sometimes twice a day and that made no sense to me because I worked out three times a day, how does he do it? The answer was Lincoln's mind was in a different place than where I was during those days. I needed to punish myself with three workouts a day to have my mind ready going into events. Many of my training partners could not keep up with what I did and they were on the Olympic ladder themselves so when I saw them quit I drew more energy from that and mentally got better each workout. McIlravy at that time already was married with two kids (he had them in college) so he was more mature than me because he had priorities to his family and it gave him a balance that he needed. He only had enough time in the day for one workout because he had responsibilities that did not allow him to train like I did. Lincoln had to get everything he could out of one workout and mentally leave that practice feeling confident.

Your approach mentally is the biggest part of your success in the sport along with the workload you put in. I won multiple medals on the world level punishing myself two to three times a day and Lincoln did the same with one workout a day. My mind needed different things to get there than his did, but we both mentally got there in our own way.

Our mental approach to training was the edge over everyone else, and I went to the Olympics everyday mentally!