**Jake Herber**

Jake Herbert: Why I Wrestle

I compete in the world’s hardest sport. I take a lot of pride in that. Anyone who disputes it, well, they simply have never wrestled. In wrestling, you need to be strong, flexible, fast, determined, athletic and relentless and have superior muscular conditioning. You need all those things while simultaneously trying to get your body down to its optimum fighting weight. Sometimes that means pulling as much as 10-20 pounds in just a few days. That’s the easy part.

The true challenge of wrestling is the mental battle that goes into each match. A wrestling match isn’t simply a competition against you and your opponent; it requires everything you have physically, mentally and emotionally each and every time you step on the mat. If you lack in just one of these areas, it can be the difference between victory and defeat.

When you’re out there on the mat, you must resort to your most basic instincts — one man versus another. Only the superior person is going to survive. It’s not always the strongest or fastest man who wins, especially on the Olympic level, where everyone is strong, fast and athletic. At that level, it’s all mental, and the person with the tougher mental fortitude usually wins.

One of the ultimate feelings in wrestling is when you can mentally break your opponent. That might sound crude to those who have not wrestled, but in that moment, it is the culmination of everything you have put in. It’s something that must be earned. You must take your own beatings, put in your time and do the extra things that others won’t. Nothing is ever just given to you in a match. There is no luck in wrestling; you must earn everything. It is through wrestling that I learned every skill necessary to make a positive impact on my country and the future generation who will lead it. Wrestling gives me the knowledge and confidence that I can stand my ground no matter how tired or hurt I am. I have been taught to fight through everything, never quit and always finish what I have started.

Wrestlers are a very unique breed. And by unique breed, I mean the most awesome breed — one that usually involves two separate lives. Off the mat, they are dedicated, loyal, caring, passionate and hard working. That’s the side that everyone sees. The other side — the one that most people don’t see — involves similar characteristics as they physically torture themselves day in and day out for the love of their sport. If you haven’t wrestled, you may never see that side of a wrestler where he or she hasn’t eaten all day in order to lose those last pounds or is attacking for a takedown in practice like a deranged lion. You won’t see them run sprints after practice is over again and again until they puke or their body shuts down. Few people ever reach this physical breaking point. I think that’s sad. And while it’s certainly nice that we no longer live in a world where survival of the fittest is a prevailing theme, I think it’s a true shame that people are rarely physically challenged anymore.

Over the course of my life, I have wrestled for many different reasons. When I was little, I wrestled because I wanted to be like my father. I still do. It was he who introduced me to the sport, and through his help and support, I developed into the mat monster I have become. I wrestled to burn off excess energy. I was always on the extremely hyperactive side. Wrestling was a positive and constructive way to focus all that energy.
In junior high, I wrestled because my friends did, and I was good at it. That’s also when it started to really grow on me, and while I was unaware of it at the time, looking back now, I see how wrestling slowly became my life. The deeper into wrestling I got, the better my opportunities in life became. In high school, I wrestled for the chance to get into an elite college into which, without wrestling, I would have never been accepted. Wrestling was my motivation as I went from a C-average student as a high school freshman to earning straight As during my senior year. In college, I wrestled to accomplish my goals, and in the years since college, I have wrestled for the opportunity to represent my country on the grandest stage.

Wrestling has made me a role model. No matter where I am or what I do, I know that I need to set a positive example. I put in 10 years of full-time training to earn the honor of being an Olympian. Why did I do it?
I wrestle because I love it. I will never make millions from wrestling. I will never be a famous sports celebrity — outside, of course, of the passionate wrestling world. I do it for my love of the sport and my love for fellow wrestlers and the entire wrestling community.

I wrestle because it makes me a better person. With every match you learn a little more about yourself and what you are capable of. You learn to go to your strengths and improve your weaknesses. If your conditioning isn’t what it needs to be, you run farther and harder. If you’re not strong enough, you lift heavier and more often. These things won’t just happen for you; you must make them happen. The same principles apply to life. You get out what you put in.

I wrestle because my country needs more people like me. People don’t need to be tough anymore in this day and age, but it’s the tough people who stand up for the small and the weak and the young. Wrestling is more than just a sport; it is a tool that develops our youth into successful, passionate and driven adults. Wrestlers make the world a better place. I strongly believe that. And I want to live in a world that has wrestling.