

THE 15 WINNING SKILLS OF COLLEGE WRESTLING

TIER 1 - THE WRESTLING OPERATING SYSTEM

(These four skills multiply every other skill. If Tier 1 is weak, nothing else works consistently.)

1. System Flow & Transitions

Has defined systems and wrestles in chains. Moves smoothly from one scoring system to the next without hesitation.

- **System flow:** How well you connect your designed systems in neutral, top, bottom, front headlock, rear standing, defense-to-offense, scrambles, and mat returns. The wrestling happens in chains, not isolated moves.
- **Transitions:** Built around positional recognition and positional acceleration. Recognizing the next scoring step early and accelerating into it before the opponent can reset.

Key ideas:

- See the next position before it appears.
- Transition instantly between your systems.
- Stay one step ahead in scrambles, escapes, and scoring chains.

2. Pace Control

Control the rhythm, control the match. Pace is the ability to decide what kind of wrestling happens and how long it happens.

A wrestler with true pace control can:

- Maintain a high-output engine: aerobic (VO₂max) + anaerobic (buffering/threshold) systems built to last 7+ minutes
- Dictate exchanges: speed it up, slow it down, or redirect it on command
- Force opponents into your rhythm instead of reacting to theirs
- Create pressure that breaks stance, position, and confidence
- Sustain purposeful, high-quality attacks
- Psychological Durability
 - Hold composure, decision-making, and aggression when fatigued, frustrated, or under score pressure.
 - The mind stays sharp while the body is tired.
 - Pace control is the hidden engine of college wrestling. When you control the pace, you control who is wrestling with a purpose.

3. Stance, Movement, Neutral Control and Attack Windows

Controls neutral position through solid stance, constant movement, and disciplined handfighting. Creates attack windows with snaps, pushes, pulls, inside control, fakes, setups, and half-shots. Uses footwork, angles, and level changes to break the opponent's stance and force reactions.

Key ideas:

- Maintain strong stance and win handfighting positions
- Create reactions instead of waiting for them
- Use clean setups to generate attack windows

4. Wrestling IQ & Match Management

College wrestling is a scoring, timing, and positional strategy game. Technique matters, but situational. Understands scoring, timing, position, and rules at a deep level. Manages the clock, edge, stall risk, and riding-time situations to create scoring advantages and avoid danger. Uses officials' tendencies, challenge rules, and match flow to make smart decisions in pressure moments.

Key ideas:

- Know where points are likely to happen
- Manage clock, position, and risk
- Use rules and officials to your advantage
- Make smart decisions in tight matches

Examples:

- With :20 left on top, stay active and stay in bounds don't give bottom a free 50/50 restart.
- Know an official's tendencies (three shots with no return fire expect a stall call).
- Understand when to trade one point to avoid giving up three.
- Know when a challenge, injury time, or blood time shifts advantage.

TIER 2 - ESCAPES

5. Bottom Escapes

Bottom decides matches at the college level. If you can't get out, you lose access to your offense, your pace, and your systems. Elite wrestlers escape early and consistently, even against strong riders, and never allow riding time or top pressure to dictate the match. Bottom requires a clear plan on every whistle and the ability to create scoring opportunities immediately after escape.

Key ideas:

- Escape early and escape often
- Have a clear first-move plan on every whistle
- Avoid riding-time pressure and danger
- Get to neutral so your systems can work

TIER 3 - NEUTRAL SCORING CORE

6. Counter Offense

They shoot and you score. Counter offense is the ability to stay calm and structured when opponents get to your legs, defend cleanly, and turn their attacks into your points. High-level counter wrestlers can *invite* or *allow* leg attacks because it enters them into their preferred scoring system.

Key ideas:

- Stay calm when opponents reach your legs
- Defend in structure, not panic
- Turn defense into scoring, not stalemates
- Square up, chase go-behinds, and score off their attacks
- Inviting attacks can be a strategy when it leads into your scoring system

7. Short Offense

Short offense is scoring and control from front headlock and mantis positions. It is a low-risk, high-reward position used to score, control the clock, kill time, or wear on an opponent. A high-level wrestler can score from these positions and also defend and recover when *they* are put in front headlock without giving up angles or points.

Key ideas:

- Control front headlock and mantis positions
- Score with snaps, drags, angles, and pressure
- Use short offense to manage the clock or slow the match
- Wear on opponents without taking unnecessary risk
- Defend and recover safely when caught in front headlock

8. Re-Attacks

Re-attacks happen when an opponent's shot changes their stance or balance and creates a brief opening. This skill measures how quickly you recognize that shift, clear the attack, and create your own angle or timing to score before they recover.

Key ideas:

- Their shot or level change alters their position and you recognize the opening instantly
- Clearing the attack with head-hands defense creates the opportunity to fire back
- Footwork and angle creation open the attack window
- Re-attacks happen in the transition before the position resets

TIER 4 - PRIMARY OFFENSE

(The scoring systems you rely on.)

9. Single-Leg System

Reliable, repeatable 3-point takedowns.

- Singles, high-c to single, low singles - all one system.
- Entry - finish - finish variations - crackdown - conversion.
- It's not the shot - it's the system.

10. Feet-to-Back Scoring

Takedown - nearfall - match-changer.

- short-offense to back, dumps, navy's, turks, body locks, etc.
- Where matches are broken open or ended.

TIER 5 - TOP GAME

Be the "King of the Hill"

11. Top Control & Riding Time

Pressure, breakdowns, mat returns.

- Rear-standing mindset mat returns.
- Gives you control of an entire period.
- Creates fear, hesitation, from your opponents.
- Riding is Tier 1 "PACE" on the mat.
 - Wears opponents out
- Give you the advantage in overtime
- Gives you points via riding time or when opponent does not choose bottom with their choice.

12. One Reliable Turn

(Backpoints = Game, Set, Match.)

A turn you trust in tight matches.

- Tilt, near wrist, cross wrist, bar, claw, leg ride, cradles, find a system that works for you.
- This is the reason to fight like hell in rear-standing and breakdowns.
- One turn changes everything.

TIER 6 - Scrambling and Situational IQ

(Minimize danger. Steal moments. Win close matches.)

13. Scramble - score, stalemate, survive

Score points, protect points, stay safe in chaos

- You don't need to win every scramble, just don't lose them.
- You can't give up big swings (2 + nearfall).
- Stalemate IQ is game changing

14. Late-Period Scoring & Control

Win the last :20 seconds through scoring or positional dominance.

Control the final exchange I, attack, defend, escape, or ride.

This covers:

- the takedown
- the escape
- the ride
- the stall play
- the clock
- the momentum

TIER 7 - I'M YOUNG & DANGEROUS

(A weapon. Not a crutch.)

15. Specialty Attacks

Mixers, spladles, high flyers.

- Makes all wrestlers dangerous.
- Doesn't make good wrestlers great without all the tiers above it.
- A finishing touch, not a foundation.
- Knockout punch ability at any time in a match