

12 Ways to Break Your Opponent

By Steve Fraser

What do I mean, "Break your opponent?" When I talk about breaking your opponent, I'm not talking about causing an injury by breaking a bone or tearing a muscle. I am talking about breaking his will to fight. Breaking his confidence and his concentration. I am talking about pushing him past his comfort zone. I am talking about taxing his mental, physical and emotional capacities. Breaking your opponent mentally means you have forced him to think negative thoughts like "he's too tough, too conditioned, and too good." I want him to think he is tired and have doubts about his chances of winning. Physically it means that your opponent is getting fatigued beyond his capacity. Emotionally breaking your opponent means that he is now completely exhausted looking just to somehow survive. He has surrendered, giving up any thoughts of winning.

Breaking your opponent's will to fight. Making him quit. What does that look like? In a match or practice you will see many signs of this. Here is a list of some things to look for.

- **Backing up:** Your opponent or training partner starts giving ground as you attack him, back peddling.
- **Stopping as soon as you go "out of bounds":** The moment you get close to or go out of bounds, he will stop wrestling.
- **Takes a long time to get back to center** (once you go out of bounds): Catching his breath, adjusting kneepads, shorts, etc. is a sure sign of breaking, Inactivity: Inactivity on the mat while wrestling or stalling.
- **Showing signs of desperation:** Your opponent will start making bad shots in desperation or giving up good position.
- **Complaining:** Complaining to the official or his coach. Showing frustration, Stumbling and showing signs of fatigue: Adjusting knee pads, shorts, tying shoes. Generally taking a lot of time, trying to recover whenever there is a break in the action.
- **Short bursts of anger with intensity:** This can mean he's desperate and frustrated. It can mean he is trying to give a last ditch effort before he breaks!

Here are 12 ways to make your opponent break in practice, thus honing and developing these skills.

1. **Out-Pummel him:** This means you will dictate the pace. Physically you will move faster with a lot of change of direction. You will push and pull him keeping him off balance and forcing him to move in a manner that he is not intending to move in. This pummeling attack should include many tie-up changes i.e. collar tie left, then right, then two-on-one, then under hook, then shot, then arm drag attempt, then shot, then two-on-one, then collar his left, right, push, pull, under hook, circle him, snap, foot sweep. This is what I call your "dance". It is your physical wrestling movements that you have honed into your normal movement; your normal attack mode. You must create your own personal "dance" that in time becomes your natural method of attacking your opponent. This dance can be physical but at the same time it should be smooth and rhythmic to you.
2. In matches when you do go out of bounds, you always hustle back to the center of the mat, eagerly waiting for your opponent to arrive, and then always making the first contact when the bout resumes.
3. When you both go into the wall in the practice room, you spin him around and keep wrestling or you can use the wall to help you get hold and continue to wrestle (if your walls are padded). No stopping or walking back to the center of the mat. This is why in our room (the U.S.

Olympic Training Center wrestling room) the padded walls are considered in bounds. Of course the added benefit to having the padded walls "in bounds" is that it teaches, very quickly I might add, the wrestlers who are backing into the wall to circle and stay in bounds. It only takes once or twice for you to get pinned into the wall and then get tossed on your back to realize you've got to stay off the wall and in the center of the mat.

4. When you take him down you turn him right away (no stopping to let him up). When you take him down you always go immediately into a turning attempt. Most wrestlers will pause/relax after they get taken down. This is not only a chance to break him but it is a great time to score! If there is no action on the mat after you have taken him down, you don't just let him up, you...
5. ...Gently or forcibly push him up from behind and as he stands up you spin him around, getting right back into his face. ...OR
6. ...If you go to push him up and he doesn't stand up (he stays down in the referees position), then you circle out to the front of him and pull him back up to his feet by cupping your hand under his chin and pulling him up. Now you may just snap him right back down to the mat, going behind for another takedown or you keep him up on his feet getting right back in his face, pushing, pulling and pummeling him again, If you go to push him up and he doesn't stand up, you circle out to the front but instead of pulling him up, you just push down on his head with one of your hands, then with the other hand. You continue to push his head down two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight times alternating hands until he gets the picture that you will not just let up on him, ...OR... *you might push on his head and then pull him up using both of the afore mentioned tactics in combination.
7. If he takes you down and stops wrestling, you continue to wrestle, jumping at the chance to reverse him or take him down when he pauses. The idea is that you continue to wrestle in all situations.
8. If you ever get put on your back you always fight off no matter what * ***YOU NEVER STOP WRESTLING***. If he stops wrestling to let you up you come up full force immediately attacking him. Have the attitude "How dare you just let me off my back. You just robbed me of the chance to improve on how to get off my back."
9. If you turn him to his back and he stops wrestling, you don't. You either hold him for a time (loosely or tightly) or you tell him "Come on, keep fighting!" or, you loosen your hold up a great deal allowing for him to fight off his back, then you immediately turn him again with either the same hold or a different one. As long as you are turning him and continuing to score you keep him down. When and if you get tired of turning him is when you pull him up getting right back into his face with the fight.
10. When you go out of bounds you continue to wrestle for 2 seconds after you hear the whistle. One *this will always leave an impression in the officials mind that you are more aggressive. Two -whenever your opponent stops wrestling and you don't, it will break him a bit more.

11. When he stops in the middle of your goes (in practice) to tie his shoe, adjust his shorts, fix his t-shirt *you continue to wrestle in his face. If you are kind enough to let him actually do this then at a minimum you hover over him, just inches away from his body, eagerly anticipating continued engagement. The moment he finishes tying, adjusting or fixing you immediately engage again in the battle. The main point is you become like fly paper on him. Always in his face, always attacking, always pulling him up, pushing him down, or spinning him around. He should feel like you are in his face or on him constantly. No pauses, no breaks, no rests.
12. If the battle ever gets heated where your opponent punches you (for whatever reason) you don't let it faze you one bit. You continue to attack him like you hardly even noticed him punching you. Now this doesn't mean you can't get more physical with your attack, but you always stay under control, never punching him back. Always just attacking him back. Remember, scoring points is the main objective and should be the ultimate pay back for any UN-sportsmanlike activity.

If he can punch you or foul you (for example, using legs in Greco) and that causes you to get mad and punch him back or complain, it is a sign that you are not focused and mentally strong enough to ignore it.

The idea is that nothing your opponent can do to you will take you out of your intense focused game plan of attacking. Nothing will faze you. Nothing will bother you. Nothing will derail your tenacious, relentless attack.

Think about it. The normal reaction to one wrestler punching another is that the wrestler getting punched will get mad. But just think what your opponent will think when he punches you and you just keep on coming. This is not the normal reaction from most wrestlers. He will think that you are an animal. He may think you are crazy or that you are a fine tuned machine. This will break your opponent's will to fight. Guaranteed!

Breaking your opponent is an attitude and it starts in practice. The attitude and tactic has to be developed, practiced, and experimented with. You have to be willing to be a little rude. I don't care if he (your opponent or training partner) is a friend or not *you have to put everything aside and force this attitude. It will sometimes feel rude of you to stay in your wrestling partner's face when he is kneeling down on the mat, tying his shoes, catching his breath or adjusting his shorts but you must ignore this and stay in front of him pushing him to keep wrestling. Again, he may turn his back to you. Again you must spin him around, never letting him rest. And, of course *if you master this in practice it will become your method of operation in your matches too.

Mark Churella, three-time NCAA Champion from the University of Michigan was the first wrestler to introduce this wrestling attitude and tactic to me. As teammates at the University of Michigan, Mark and I trained together daily. For me it was "learn this intense style of wrestling or be gobbled up by this tenacious champion". Three-time Olympian Dan Chandler from Minnesota was another example of a great wrestler who mastered the art of breaking his opponents. "Breaking your opponent has been the cause of some of the biggest upsets in the sport of wrestling, including Rulon Gardner's monumental upset over Alexandre Karelin at the 2000 Sydney Olympics."

As Dan Chandler notes above, Olympic Champion Rulon Gardner beat the great Alexandre Karelin from Russia with this wrestling attitude. Rulon broke him! No doubt about it! Matt Lindland won the Olympic and World Silver medals breaking his opponents will to fight. Wrestling heroes Dan Gable, Terry & Tom Brands and John Smith to name a few all master the skills of breaking their opponents.

If you want to acquire the ability to break your opponents will to fight, start practicing these 12 tactics in your everyday practice room. Remember, it starts with an attitude of relentless intensity and focus on staying in your partner's face constantly. Continuing to wrestle in all positions and situations is important. Remember, scoring points is the ultimate breaker. The more you learn to develop this relaxed but intense wrestling style and focus, the more you will be able to use these tactics in your wrestling strategy and method of operation.

I have written in the past about the Grind Match and its benefits. The Grind Match is a one to two hour no stop wrestling match that will greatly develop the tactics, skills and attitudes that are required when "breaking your opponent"; especially if you have identified these issues as an area to improve and perfect. This longer, usually lower intensity wrestling exercise will really promote and allow for focus in this area. Once you have felt what it is like to "break your opponent" in these one to two hour matches, then you can set the goal to break the next guy in less time, and so on, and so on, with the ultimate goal of being able to break your opponent in six minutes or less.

When you break your opponent's will to fight, you will see how much fun your wrestling will become. Once your opponent breaks it's like taking candy from a baby! I wish you the best and "Make some babies cry!"

And, as always, "Expect to Win with Relentless Intensity!"