

**WRESTLING**  
**AND**  
**THE FIGHT OR FLIGHT RESPONSE**

By Dr. Bill Welker

In layman's terms, the Fight or Flight Response is how one reacts "*to a perceived harmful event, attack or threat to survival in life*" (Walter Bradford Cannon). This piece is dedicated to wrestlers, and all athletes, who choose the Fight Response, gallantly prepared to face their formidable adversaries head-on.

There is no sport more physical and more stressful mentally and emotionally than wrestling. This one-on-one competition is a very personal, combative experience for the wrestler, which affects the entire family as well.

With that being said, imagine being a younger brother whose older male sibling was very successful on the mats. Of course, everyone expects you to do the same. Can you truly understand what pressure is placed on the younger brother's shoulders? Such situations produce extreme internal and external stress on the younger sibling.

Now let's take this a step further. What if you were a younger brother whose emotional demeanor and psychological make-up was not conducive to the pressures associated with competitive activities?

Still, you compete on the mats. Some of you will end up better than your older siblings, others will experience the same success on the mats, and still others will just be "so, so" as wrestlers. The point is, you had the internal fortitude to try. And

**that's all any parent should ever hope for from their children.**

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**Now let us also not forget those valiant wrestlers who compete in weight classes where there is very strong competition in which many participants are ranked high in state and national polls. The “Flight Response” is not in these individuals’ competitive nature.**

**Such wrestlers could have moved up or down a weight class, guaranteeing themselves victories in the championship finals. Instead, they courageously chose to face their toughest competition head on – win or lose.**

**As a youngster growing up, one of my wrestling heroes was Bob Fehrs. Fehrs attended Milton Hershey High School located in Hershey, Pennsylvania. While wrestling there, he was a prep school national champion and voted as the Outstanding Wrestler his senior year.**

**Bob Fehrs chose to matriculate at Michigan as a “Wolverine” freshman wrestler in 1964. Back then college freshmen could not compete as varsity wrestlers. So Fehrs had to wait until the following year to wrestle at nationals.**

**As a sophomore, Bob Fehrs lost to Lehigh’s Mike Caruso in the NCAA finals by a score of 8-5 in the 123-pound weight class. But it doesn’t end there. As a junior, Fehrs lost to Caruso in the finals a second time, 9-6. Then as a senior, Bob Fehrs nearly pulled off an upset in the finals a third time against Caruso, but lost 7-6 by a riding time point. Bob Fehrs was devastated.**

**On the awards stand, Fehrs was in tears. Immediately, Mike Caruso grabbed his hand out of total admiration for his opponent’s magnificent, gladiator-like effort.**

**They both gripped hands tightly as the crowd gave Bob Fehrs a standing ovation when he received his second-place plaque.**

**After the tournament, Caruso asked Fehrs why he didn't move up to 130, where he would have easily won a national championship.**

**Bob Fehrs responded, "If I would have done that, I would be admitting to myself that I couldn't beat you, and I never believed that."**

**Years later, Mike Caruso said, "Losing is not terrible. Even the best have to lose sometime. Quitting after you lose is what's terrible. Wrestlers like Bob Fehrs don't know how to spell the word."**

**Their friendship has lasted a lifetime.**

***"There are some defeats more triumphant than victories."***

**-- Michel de Montaigne**