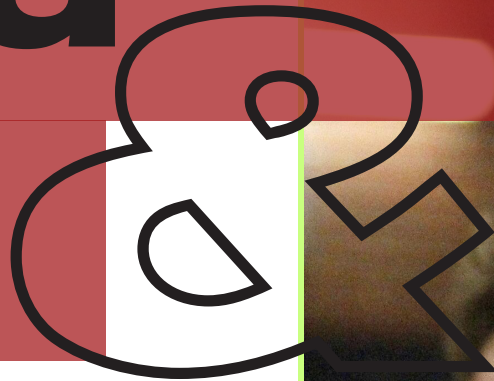


Blood Sweat Tears



With the immense amount of energy consumed in practice and training as well as actually playing games, athletes must watch their diet and make sure they are getting the most out of what they put in their body. Strict weight limits for each class in wrestling means a wrestler has to minimize the amount of food they eat but must get all the necessary nutrients and protein to allow him to win. While many high schoolers love unhealthy meals such as pizza, hamburgers, ice cream, and chips, those in wrestling cut out everything that isn't almost entirely protein or water. From spitting into cups to taking laxatives to skipping multiple meals, to those so dedicated to their team and sport, these sacrifices are all worth it, though to the average person it seems as some kind of punishment. But even if one feels it's necessary for them to push through the hunger and surrender their favorite snacks and junk food, that doesn't mean they don't miss it.

"Sometimes, I'm just dying to have a huge cake, a big cake, you know? Like, I knew this guy who's birthday was in the middle of the season and all he had was a slice of watermelon and two grapes and that was his birthday treat while his family ate his actual birthday cake because he was cutting weight. So I'm telling you that once the season's over we're just monsters that'll devour anything and everything we can," described Trenton Manuel (12).

A first class ticket to ride the struggle bus isn't unique to just wrestling of course. Though wrestlers may take it to extremes, all other athletes including basketball players do the same. Diets restricted to almost entirely fruits, foods high in protein like chicken and protein shakes, and so much pasta it puts Olive Garden to shame tend to be the main features of most menus in the houses of high school athletes.

As brutal as it is to play any sport and deal with insurmountable hardships many student athletes overcome, that shared experience only ties the players closer together. As they all make sacrifices for not only themselves, but one another, it connects them and drives them to only play harder for each other.

Years from now, many of them will look back on the times they spent with their teammates working hard and pushing through the pain and doubts they had in order to not only win for themselves, but the guy or girl next to them. The main aspect of many sports played at high schools is the idea of a team, and these athletes exemplify what it means to play and work as a team. As many athletes will tell you, it is not just about them, but about the team as one and what they can accomplish together. The common saying, "there is no 'I' in team" highlighted by the commitment to one another demonstrates how these players are not only peers, teammates, and friends, but have become a family. "I feel like they're all my brothers because we've all bleed together, sweat together, and cried together, doing a lot of tournaments and things, the struggles, and we've just always been there for each other," Jorge Felix (12).

"Most people don't realize it's a mental game, if you're big and bad and you go out there and do the most pushups or do the most pull ups but you don't have that mental determination to win, you'll be out within the first month."

- Trenton Manuel (12)



Top: Senior varsity wrestler Jorge Felix (12) locks up with his Cherry Creek opponent at the start of their six-minute match. Matches lasting this long require that each wrestler uses 100% of their energy and push themselves to the limit in order to secure victory. In such a rough and difficult sport, making it through the challenges, "is always fun because you look back on it and know that it was worth it," said Felix. Photo by Thomas Wynne



Middle: Varsity player Brock LaBonde (12) walks onto the mat prepared to go for the quick take-down in the varsity match. With only one chance to prove themselves each event, wrestlers have to make it count and not get ahead of themselves, taking every move one step at a time. "It's all about the discipline and how you can use it, the consistency part and continuing to show up and do what's good for you and your body," said LaBonde. Photo by Thomas Wynne

Bottom: The Cougar wrestling team continues their dominate season ranking withing the top five in the state with an easy win at Cherry Creek High School as they become more and more determined to take home a state championship title. Varsity wrestler Brock LaBonde (12) quickly takes down his Creek foe. "It's definitely bonded us together because from freshman year to now, there's definitely been a solid group of us that have just continued to stick to it and we've grown as friends greatly," said LaBonde. Photo by Thomas Wynne