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JOURNAL ARTICLES

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## Wrestling Escapes and Breakdowns

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In the past couple months' articles we have gone over some of the basics of wrestling. We've looked at a small set of movements from the feet, but what happens when we get on the mat? This month we will talk about the bottom position for escapes and reversals as well as breakdowns from the top position.

When you and your opponent are set up with one in the bottom position, on hands and knees, and one in the top position, above and behind the other, with one arm around his waist and the other on the elbow, this is known as the "referee's" position. The bottom person is on his knees and typically sitting on his ankles, with toes pointed back. If you sit on your heels and leave your toes in the mat, you give your opponent more options for breaking you down, which we will look at later in the article. The hands are positioned about ten inches in front of the knees and your weight should rest mainly on your butt. If you rock too far forward onto your hands, it gets you off balance and can again open the door for you to get broken down more easily.

From the top position you can line up on either the left or right side of the opponent's body. The most common is on the left side of the body, but it's a good idea to know how to line up on either side in order to be more

versatile. To keep things simple here, we will go over lining up on the left side of the opponent's body. Your left knee should line up right along the side of your opponent's left knee. It can't be in front of it, though, or the referee will caution you. If your knee is in front of your opponent's, it gives you an unfair advantage, which is why it warrants a caution. Your left hand goes on the

left elbow of your opponent. Your right foot is up behind your opponent and your right knee right behind his butt, which you can use effectively for some uncomfortable "bumping" in breakdowns. Your right hand wraps around your opponent's body and is placed pretty much on your opponent's belly button. (I would not suggest feeling around for it as this might

give your opponent the wrong idea.) This is the position you will start in any time there is a break in the match and you are already in the top or bottom position. It is also where you will begin after the first period if either you or the other wrestler chooses the top or bottom position.

### Escapes

Escapes are exactly what they sound like: getting out of the bottom position and away from your opponent. One of the most important things you can do to increase your chance of escaping is to move right off

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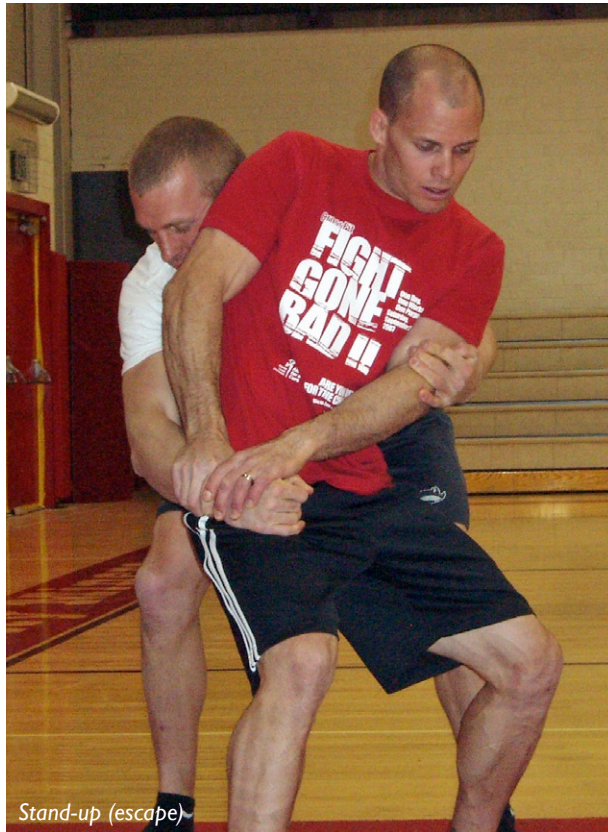
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## Wrestling Escapes and Breakdowns (continued...)



Stand-up (escape)

the whistle (if you are starting from a dead stop). The other is to keep moving! If you sit still on the bottom, it allows your opponent the chance to work different angles from the top. You want to be constantly moving around and making an effort to get out. But how do you actually get out? We will look at two of the most basic escapes here: the “stand-up” and the “switch.”

The stand-up is incredibly simple, and it’s also probably the most commonly used escape. From the bottom position, bring one of your legs up to put you in a lunge position. Which leg you bring up depends on your opponent’s weight distribution and positioning. As you bring your foot up, you want to be getting wrist control by grabbing hold of one of your opponent’s wrists. If you don’t do this, he will have full use of both hands to try to break you back down again. Once you get your foot up and have wrist control, lean back into your opponent. Don’t go too nuts here, as you don’t want to get sucked back onto your butt or, worse, your back. You should be leaning back into

your opponent while trying to force the wrist you have down to your “back pocket.” This means holding onto that wrist with one or both of your hands and pulling the opponent’s arm down and behind you while leaning back a bit. As you start to lean back and pull the wrist down, bring your other leg up to take you to a standing position. Many times this is where the battle really begins.

From here your opponent wants to get you back to the mat by lifting, tripping, or otherwise taking you down. This is why it’s so important to have wrist control and a good base. Once you get yourself on a solid base and have good wrist control, continue to push the opponent’s hand into your “back pocket” and cut back into your opponent with the opposite hand. If you just try to turn away, you end up turning your back on your opponent and are very vulnerable for a takedown—and put you right back into the position you just worked so hard to get out of. As you cut back into your opponent, you want to end up back in your stance. If you are out of your stance, you leave yourself open for a takedown again.

Another move that can be used to get you out of the bottom position, the switch, can be done from a standing or seated position, but we’ll focus on the seated one in this article since we’re talking about escapes. You can perform a switch to either the left or the right, depending on where your opponent lines up. Let’s suppose he lines up on the left side, as in the stand-up example above. From the “referee’s position,” the first



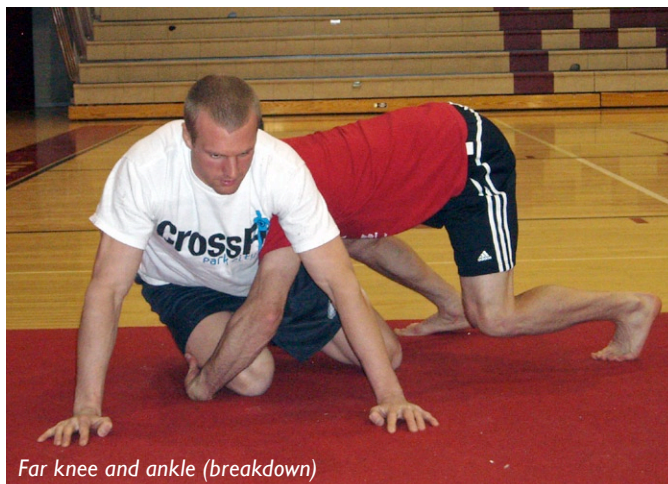
Switch (reversal)

## Wrestling Escapes and Breakdowns (continued...)

thing you do is lift your right knee and move your left arm across your right one. This opens your hips up to sit and clears your opponent's hand from your elbow. After you lift your knee, sit fast and hard onto your right butt cheek. If you land on the left side of your butt, you didn't make it far enough around and are in danger of exposing your back, so sit hard and fast to that right side. As you hit your butt to the ground, your right hand reaches underneath the opponent's right leg (which is usually still up, with knee bent, from being in the referee's position). Pull on the knee and bring your left hand up and around the opponent's body to grab his hip or waist and help pull yourself up and on top of him. This counts as a reversal and rewards you with two points, unlike the stand-up, which is an escape and earns you just one point. Both of these moves are safe and can be very effective when done correctly.

### Breakdowns

Now that you know a couple of ways to get out from the bottom position, what do you do when you're on top and your opponent is trying to get out from under you? You need to break him down from his base. The most effective place for him to be when on the bottom is on his hands and knees, with his back to you. This allows for good mobility and defense against getting turned for back points. You want to get your opponent off his base, preferably onto his stomach, and make it more difficult for him to escape or reverse. We will go over two basic but effective breakdowns here: the "far knee and ankle" and the "spiral ride." Again, I will describe both of these moves from a position of lining up on the left side of the body.



Far knee and ankle (breakdown)

For the far knee and ankle I like to set up with my chest a little lower on my opponent in the referee's position. This helps get you to where you are going a little bit faster than you normally would be able to. It can also be effective to leave your right knee down, instead of up as is usual in the referee's position. It means both of your knees will be on the ground from the top position. Your knees will have to end up in this position so that you can drive on your toes to knock your opponent over. If you line up like this, it is one less step you have to take in the breakdown, which increases your chance of completing the move successfully. This is legal. Again, if this is from a stop in action and you are starting from a dead stop, it is crucial that you spring into action right off the whistle. The first thing you want to do is simultaneously move both hands. Your right hand goes directly to the opponent's far (right) ankle, and your left hand goes between the opponent's chest and knees to grab his far (right) knee. As you do this, drop your chest down and keep your head up tall for good positioning. You should now be now lined up perpendicular to your opponent. From here, forcefully pull the far ankle and knee toward you as you push your chest forward; your opponent should fall to his hip. Now is your time to react and move up his body and keep pressure on his upper body to keep him on the mat.

The spiral ride is a little bit more complicated, but it can also be very effective for keeping your opponent on the mat. Against more experienced wrestlers, it will be difficult to completely break them down but the spiral is still very effective to prevent them from standing up. Again you are going to move your arms simultaneously right off the bat. The right hand goes to the inside of your opponent's right thigh and your left will reach under his left arm and run up along his chest or neck. This alone does nothing for you. The important part is the pressure you place on the opponent. As you get your arms in position, your chest comes farther up on his back and you can get up on both of your feet. While keeping up pressure, circle far to the left and push your left arm forward and your right back. This movement lengthens out your opponent's body and takes away at least one, and possibly both, of his posts on the mat. If you do it well, you can circle your opponent all the way to the mat. If you run into a tougher opponent with the skill to resist the move, it's still useful for preventing stand-ups and even switches.



## Wrestling Escapes and Breakdowns (continued...)

These two moves from top and two from bottom are some of the basics and work very well. Even if they don't work independently or as planned, they can open up other doors and opportunities for you. Last month I talked about moving from one finish to the next in your takedowns; the same thing applies for escapes and breakdowns. If one doesn't work, you need to know a variety of others that you can go directly to in order to keep your opponent on the mat—or at least to keep him guessing as to how you are going to make an escape or reversal. Once you perfect fundamental moves like this and have them reliably in your repertoire, you can go on to learn more complicated things that build on the basics. It may be surprising to some of you how many of the moves used even by experts are the basics. The key is to be able to consistently perform them with near perfection and with excellent timing in order to score on your opponent.



Referees Position



Escapes



Breakdowns



Chris Spealler, a.k.a. “Speal” runs [CrossFit Park City](#) in Park City, Utah. He was a Division I college wrestler at Lock Haven University in Pennsylvania. Graduating in 2002, he finished two matches away from becoming an All-American at nationals. Speal now enjoys feeding the competition bug with CrossFit and training with one of his wrestling team members, Eric O'Connor (“Eric O”) on the side.