

Shadow Wrestling

Shadow Drilling is a great way to develop your skills, speed and conditioning. I was a boxing fan during elementary school, watching legends Sugar Ray Leonard and Muhammad Ali on television. I learned that shadow boxing plays an integral role in the training regimen of every boxer. When I started wrestling in middle school, I quickly incorporated shadow drilling into my training program. I was slow and chubby so my shadow drilling was not very fluent, but I steadily improved every day. I stayed after practice and rehearsed the moves that I knew until I felt like I could do them reasonably well. I had a mat in my house so I would also shadow drill my moves in the evenings after doing my homework and strength training. Shadow drilling teaches you to control your body. Let's face it, until you have self control, how can you execute a move on a partner, especially if he is fighting back?

Shadow drilling is not just for beginners. It remained a significant part of my training regimen throughout my high school, college, and international career. It could play an important role in the success of wrestlers of any skill level. If my memory serves me correctly, I remember reading an article in AWN a few years ago. It was by John Smith and more recently an article by Dan Gable, in USA Wrestler on the benefits of shadow drilling. I cannot recollect ever seeing an article outlining specific methods of shadow drilling. These aforementioned articles discussed the importance of shadow drilling, but not actually how to go about it. I will tackle this topic in the following paragraphs. Forgive me if this is elementary to some of my coaching peers. If you pick up a couple little things, it will be worth the five minutes it takes to read.

Shadow drilling is an integral part of my Gold Medal Wrestling School Training Program. In a two hour practice, shadow drilling will typically encompass 5 - 12 minutes of the structured workout. Early in the season we do it at the beginning of practice for skill development and later in the year we do it at the end of practice to develop speed and conditioning. At my summer camps, I make my students shadow drill before and after sessions to review the techniques that have been taught. Shadow drilling not only helps your physical skills and conditioning, but it also enhances your retention of technique and gives you more confidence in your techniques. You can shadow drill just about any move, but the following is a list of the Top 10 Team Shadow Drills that I believe are the most practical and effective. Five of these drills are for takedowns and five are for bottom work. It is difficult to shadow drill pinning combinations, but you can use visualization and imagery skills to rehearse top techniques. It is amazing how much riding time you can accumulate if you put your "mind" to it.

1) **Inside Step Attack Drill** - Instruct your students to all face one direction and do body fakes and level changes from a low staggered stance. When you yell attack and/or reach your arms up, they should quickly shoot a double or high crotch to a double. They should then drive across such that they rotate 180 degrees and are facing the opposite wall in a low stance after each shot. If their right leg is in front of them they should rotate to the right (as if driving "away from their head") and vice versa. This will teach kids to change directions quickly and to get an angle on their shots.

2) **Knee Spin Sweep Attack Drill** - Tell students to stay low and move laterally as if trying to make opponent step forward so they can hit a head inside sweep single. When they attack they must spin on their lead knee and swing their back foot around to get an angle. Make them finish quickly on their imaginary opponent, ideally by quickly picking up the leg or reaching behind and catching far leg while still on their knees. Wrestlers should immediately get back in low stance and resume lateral motion after every shot.

3) **Back Arch/Back Step/Sag Drill** - Once students understand the skills call this "Throw Drill". Have wrestlers pretend they are in an upper body over - under or other tie up situations and call off moves such as lateral drops, hip toss, headlock and other techniques that require the back arch, back step or sag throw skills. Make sure they are all facing the same direction before each throw, particularly on the back arches.

4) **Sprawl Drill, Sprawl and Spin (on hands) Drill and Sprawl Re-shot Drill** - Insist that students immediately return to good stance and create motion between each repetition. Combine this sprawl with attack drills listed above.

5) **Random Attack Drill** - Combine the four drills detailed above with an array of other techniques. You yell out what attack you want wrestlers to do and they quickly react. Start off with simple techniques, but once they get a hang of it over time be creative. After each shot make them all circle in a good stance, so they are all facing the same direction before you call off the next attack. This drill teaches kids to chain wrestle on their feet going from one move to another and is a great conditioner.

6) **Stand Up Drill** - Use a whistle and give kids time to get set between repetitions. Make them explode backwards, cut away, and face opposite wall in their stance after each repetition, analogous to Inside Step Attack Drill.

7) **1 & 2 Drill** - Stand up and cut off for 1 point escape and then immediately attack legs for 2 point takedown. If done correctly student will rotate approximately 180 degrees on stand up and again on leg attack. They will be facing the same wall before every repetition.

8) **Hip Heist Drill** - This great drill not only helps student improve their switch, sit out and wrist roll, but also enhances their ability to scramble (agility). It is an intense anaerobic conditioning exercise when done quickly for 5 -15 repetitions or seconds. Make a race out of it if you really want to see some hips and feet flying. Tell kids it is break dance training and they may actually think they are having fun.

9) **Granby's** - Develop an array of Granby skills on your own by executing shoulder rolls, flips, reverse Granby's, shrugs, head spins and standing Granby's. Make sure kids have plenty of space and all go simultaneously in same direction.

10) **Combination Bottom Drilling** - One of keys to getting off bottom is putting your moves together and combination shadow drilling is a great way to learn how to "chain wrestle" off bottom. Have your students execute whatever techniques you tell them to do immediately when you yell the move. Start with simple combinations of two moves and then build up to doing 3, 4, and more moves in a row. They should not go back to referees position between each individual move. Wrestlers should keep moving quickly until you yell "escape" and they finish their chain of techniques with a score.

Remember, these are just examples. You can create your own sequences based on you or your team's favorite techniques. For example, if you like carries, ducks, and drags incorporate them into your shadow drilling routines. If you work the head often, incorporate snap downs, slide bys, shrugs, ankle picks, and headlocks. The sky is the limit. Keep it simple at first until your students get a hang of it and then make it interesting. Variety is important if you wish to keep your students intense and motivated.

I shadow drilled often in 7th and 8th grades, but got away from it a little my first two years of high school. I suppose I was so crumby in middle school, the only person I could whip was my own shadow. Anyway, my junior year I finally learned to bang across on my high crotches which were good and bad. Good because I was scoring a lot of high crotch takedowns, but bad because I got a huge cauliflower ear that would refill every time it was drained. After a couple months of frustration and increasing pain, I finally listened to the doctor and agreed to take 2 weeks off the mat and so the cast on my ear would work. This turned out to be a blessing in disguise. The first day that I had my cast on at practice, I did all the running and exercises with the team then watched while they drilled and wrestled. I was bored to death sitting out. It was at this time that I rediscovered shadow drilling. During the ensuing 2 weeks I shadow drilled endlessly while my teammates drilled and wrestled. Not only did it help me stay sharp and in shape, but it also helped me develop my mental skills. Shadow drilling enhanced my confidence. In addition to thinking about the moves I was hitting, I was also imagining myself beating the tar out of every opponent that stood between me and a State Championship. At the end of this 2 week "layoff" our team had a major 32 team tournament that I had to enter without any contact practice. I was not sure how I would perform being "off the mats" so

long, but things went great! I had one of the most focused performances of my career, dominating everyone and winning my first ever outstanding wrestler award. In the finals I beat the #4 ranked wrestler in the state by technical fall scoring seven takedowns. It was like he was not even there. It was just like wrestling my shadow at practice. Everything I hit worked perfectly. I had beaten this same opponent by a 7-4 score only 5 weeks earlier. Although I am sure there were many factors involved in this unique performance, from that time on I have been totally sold on the benefits of shadow drilling. It was instrumental to my success as an athlete and it has played an integral role in the development of the many students I have coached. I encourage you to make shadow drilling a regular and intense part of your training schedule as you strive to have a peak performance in your most important competitions.