

Just One Step

*The Single Technique that Transforms
Ordinary Wrestlers into Extraordinary Wrestlers*



*Turn your average shot
into a bullet that opponents
CANNOT STOP!*

written by Steve McCardell

with a Foreword by Patrick Milkovich

Foreword

When Steve McCardell contacted me to write the foreword for “Just One Step,” I was happy to oblige because I know that his message is crucial for all beginning wrestlers. In every sport, there are basic, fundamental techniques that, when mastered, allow for a rapid acceleration of success. In this booklet, Steve explains the most important fundamental skill in wrestling.

As a nationally known wrestling clinician, I am constantly amazed at other instructors who find it necessary to try to impress campers with flashy, razzle-dazzle moves that have a

Just One Step

low probability of success, that are not fundamentally sound, and that are far beyond the skill level of their audience.

What Steve advocates here is one of the most important — if not *the* most important — concepts that one must master to be successful in wrestling. For virtually every wrestling move that will allow a wrestler to gain penetration to his opponent, a wrestler must execute “just one step” to get him there quickly and efficiently, and it must be fundamentally and technically precise.

Mastering this one step opens the door for the following high percentage techniques and their variations: a fireman’s carry, an out-

by Steve McCardell

side fireman's (barrel roll), a single leg, a double leg, an arm drag, a duck-under, a high-crotch, a heel pick, or any move that takes a wrestler forward to his opponent.

Reading and following Steve's advice in *Just One Step* would be an excellent first step to put any wrestler on his pathway to success.

—Patrick Milkovich

Chapter 1

In the late 1980s, fate was bringing together a revolution in a town never known for its strength in wrestling. Rochester, Michigan was no wrestling Mecca; for sure in my years of youth wrestling I had never been there for a tournament because they never held any for that age. So what fate had in store would surprise this growing town.

Not only did it just so happen that a number of experienced wrestlers moved from different towns into Rochester, but that this group would also enter high school at a most peculiar time. Somehow, in a way that

by Steve McCardell

miracles never explain, our school hired a new wrestling coach from MSU. But I don't mean just any coach. I mean someone who twice placed first at the NCAA wrestling tournament, and in his off years, placed second. He won the tournament as a freshman (youngest NCAA champ ever!) and was named Outstanding Freshman in the Nation. He won again as a sophomore. And now, he was our high school wrestling coach. Go figure.

Rochester Adams had somehow hired Pat Milkovich, son of legendary wrestling coach Mike Milkovich (from Maple Heights, Ohio). And Pat was about to create his own legend in our town. This school, absolutely unknown

Just One Step

for its wrestling skills, became a powerhouse in just one year. And for the most part, with Just One Step.

It was the '88-'89 wrestling season when everything came together like this. The team was renowned for its poor performance. But with the addition of Milkovich and a handful of promising young talent, that same team went to 12-4 in just two years, tying as division champions. The following year they held the division by themselves. And that only began a lasting legacy of county championships and runs for state championships — with success in 1998 — until “the Milkman” took a leave of absence in 2001 with a record of 206-43-3.

by Steve McCardell

I'm not going to pretend that a number of factors didn't play into this. The very fact of our coach's personality drove us to work harder than we would have under just about anyone on the planet. There's not a substitution in wrestling for hard work. Having a group of talent to work with for making that transformation also helps, and I trust that brought about greater interest in area wrestling, which later brought more talent to choose from.

But, if I can point to Just One Step that revolutionized my own wrestling, and I believe made the difference in an entire team, it was our coach's technique for shooting that

Just One Step

outdid any other I have seen. It turned my own record upside down in one season and had me in the state championships a few years later. I believe it can revolutionize the wrestling experience for nearly any wrestler or any team out there.

Chapter 2

I began wrestling in fifth grade, which, I discovered to my dismay, was a late start compared to many. My early years found my nose planted on the mat as often as they found my back pinned to it. I guess the two go hand in hand. My dad helped to coach me and always encouraged me with the idea of anticipation. “Never shoot to your opponent’s legs,” he explained, “because by the time you’re there, they won’t be. You’ve got to shoot a couple feet behind.”

Well and good if you’re able to do that. My first problem was that I was just too

Just One Step

darned scared to shoot in because I knew from early experience that shooting generally meant having my nose cross-faced ... well, off my face. If you're pitted against experienced opponents in your first few matches, that's just how it's going to be, and it's enough to keep a lot of kids from ever trying a real shot again. When they *do* try to shoot, all they can think is that they'd better just pretend to shoot (*so my coach thinks I'm trying*) because if they really go in, they'll lose their noses. Problem is, that's the exact thinking that ends up losing them their noses — the half-attempt at a real shot.

Once a wrestler gets past the fear of cross-faces and decides to just shoot a couple feet

by Steve McCardell

behind the opponent — to reach him where he'll be after a sprawl — the very technique usually taught for shooting keeps him from really reaching that goal. A very fast wrestler may still succeed; an experienced wrestler can overcome just about any average technique against a rookie who also has average technique. But if you're against someone who's your equal and you're using the very average technique usually taught for shooting, you may face a lot of problems ever hitting his legs.

I suspect those problems are the reason a lot of wrestlers shrug their shoulders and end up trying for upper-body moves, which look

Just One Step

great when they succeed, but which also tend to come with a lot more risk. There are of course techniques for overcoming some of this risk, but with a good shot, you face fewer problems. (One note: when you *do* opt for upper-body, keep in mind one principle: you're not trying to throw the wrestler so much as get him to the mat. It's the throwing that creates momentum your opponent can use against you. If more wrestlers used the headlock by trying to drop the arm behind the head relatively straight to the ground — rather than throwing it outwards while throwing their opponents — they'd knock out all the momentum that's used to roll on through,

by Steve McCardell

putting them onto their own backs! Think a cowboy ever wrestled a steer to the ground by throwing it? No way.)

If wrestling experience tells me anything by now, it's that no one has to face those problems in shooting. Oh sure, there is no perfect move; there is a counter to everything. But I will tell you that anyone getting down this one technique I learned under a two-time NCAA champion coach will find his shooting *vastly* improved, and I'm convinced that a coach could invigorate any team with this single method. So what is this method? It's a matter of Just One Step.

Chapter 3

I don't know what's most often taught, but when I first started wrestling, I was shown a basic stance that included having my feet nearly in line, about shoulder-width apart. Crouch down, head up, hands out, you're ready to wrestle, right?

Not ideally.

With feet in line and shoulder-width (or so) apart, you may have balance right and left. But if someone pushes or pulls on you, you've got little to support you. So the ideal stance that's generally used is a stagger stance, roughly shoulder-width. That way you've got balance

by Steve McCardell



Parallel Stance



Stagger Stance

Just One Step

both left and right, and forward and backward. Ok, so that's just about a wrestling given.

Now let's head into the practice room. Time to practice shooting. Everyone do the duck walk across the room — you know, shoot one foot forward and drop to that knee; shoot the next foot forward and push to the knee; other foot; other foot. Ok, good ... you've made it across the mat.

I was experienced enough by high school to know the drill very well, didn't have to watch my coach, and happily plunged along in the duck walk on our first day of practice. And coach just raised an eyebrow. "What is this?" he asks me.

by Steve McCardell

“The duck walk,” I reply confidently.

“Well, that’s not quite how I teach it here,” he tells me. “I’d like you to try something else.”

This time I had to watch, and to my shock, Coach Milkovich was showing me something I’d never seen before, and that very little something was Just One Step. Although others may use this step, I have never before seen it *emphasized* as a shooting technique. And when I see just gobs of struggling high school shooting, I know that bringing full attention to this step can change a wrestler’s whole style. I know, because it completely changed mine.

Just One Step

And what is this one step? It is a shift of the back foot to nearly meeting with the front foot before a shot is taken. The simple reason? The back foot is the foot you launch from when you shoot, and if it stays way back, your shot will fall short. Bring it up a foot or two and suddenly you're shooting one to two feet further in. Now all of a sudden, shooting two feet beyond your opponent is not just a good idea; it's something you can really do!

You could be thinking a few things about this tiny — yet gigantic — suggestion. I'll try to address them. First: it's so simple that it's stupid! My answer? It is completely simple. That's why it has the chance to change

by Steve McCardell



Foot placement just before the shot.

Just One Step

someone's career. Stupid? Could be if you don't like winning. But when I added that one little step, I changed a mediocre career into an incredibly winning career. My first year under Milkovich, I was wrestling up two weight classes to make varsity as a freshman ... so that accounts for some of my struggle. But that first year I had only a couple wins and probably four times as many losses. As a sophomore, wrestling at my weight and having learned this new technique, I literally reversed my record — a transformation much like the one the school record saw when Milkovich arrived. After that I moved away and went to school in Pennsylvania. But I still

by Steve McCardell

had that technique, and in my senior year — with this one simple step as my shooting basis — I lost to only one opponent in the regular season and took second at the state tournament. So I'll call this one move simple, but never stupid.

Second: stepping one foot in so close to the other defeats the whole purpose of the stance — you have no balance. My answer: absolutely true, but not an issue in practice. The reason is that this step happens so fast there is no chance to use this point against you.

Third: how can it possibly be that fast? Shooting is hard enough without adding all

Just One Step

the time of an extra step! My answer: again, absolutely true if you're just trying to step and shoot. But as with many moves, there is an easy set-up to this one that eliminates the time of that extra step ... which is also why this is too fast to use against you.

Doubtful? Just read on!

Chapter 4

So, you want to know how an extra step added to a shot can add absolutely no time at all, do you? As I said, setting up properly, this can be done.

Next question: what's the oldest shooting trick in the book — one that any human has a hard time not reacting to? Of course: tapping your opponent on the forehead. So far as that works for any shooting, that works for the technique of Just One Step. After all, if you're going to take the time to tap the forehead, you can use *that same time* to plant your back foot closer to the front in preparation

Just One Step

for your shot. In other words, by taking care of both items in the same time period, you are adding no time at all.

Ok, so I've stated a technical truth, and yes, this technique can work. But I do not recommend it. Why? First, because while I believe the tap can work, it's not my ideal approach. Reaching up to tap someone's forehead means taking one hand out of position and leaving your own legs partly undefended. If your opponent knows your technique, or if you don't shoot on the very first tap (*I'll just set him up a couple times first so he doesn't know when I'm coming*), he can anticipate you and shoot just when you've moved your hand

by Steve McCardell

out of the way for him. Happy birthday to him.

Second, as far as tapping with the extra step included goes, I am confident that your shot will be much improved. The problem is, if your opponent *does* anticipate your tap-tap-tapping approach, and if you take that step while tapping, then he gets a happy birthday times two. When he shoots (just before you *mean* to shoot), your legs are together for an even easier take-down. One of the questions I addressed in the last chapter asked about this point, and yes ... it *can* be a problem in this case. But there's a better approach for setting up a shot.

Just One Step

Every team I've seen practices the sideways shuffle because you need your feet to easily dance sideways when you're wrestling. Whether tied up or not, wrestlers tend to move from side to side, or even in circles, while jockeying for position or preparing to shoot. As for foot position, the lead foot decides the direction, and if direction switches, the feet had better switch too. Moving to the left, the left foot will be nearest your opponent and the right will anchor. Opposite this when moving to the right.

So now we've got to picture things again. Imagine that you're locking arms with your opponent, working for inside position (espe-

by Steve McCardell

cially so you can shoot!), and the two of you are circling to the left. What are your feet positions? Your left foot is forward, your right foot is back; and as you circle, the right foot comes in near the left, then the left steps away from the right.

And there it is.

You have just seen how the one step that can revolutionize your shooting takes no extra time at all. If you didn't see it, that's because it's *just that fast!* So again, your left foot is forward, your right foot is back; and as you circle, *the right foot comes in near the left.* That is your step. When you're circling, you can bring the anchor foot in close to the fore-foot

Just One Step

1.



2.



3.



Foot positions when circling left.

by Steve McCardell

without adding any extra time to your shot ... but *with* adding about two feet to the depth of your shot! If you're doubtful that it makes this much difference, try it and see!

There are two points to make about this subtlety. I mentioned that some wrestlers may already use this technique, but that it may not be emphasized. They may be using it, because circling happens! But without realizing where their success comes from on certain shots, they may not be as consistent as they'd like to be. *Emphasizing this one subtle step helps wrestlers know what must somehow be worked into their set-ups if they want to shoot with consistent success.*

Just One Step

The other point is that circling does *not* always occur naturally, yet you may want it to just so that you can get in your step. This is not a problem, because as always, there's a way to get into position through set-up. You're working to tie up the arms, and all it takes to circle to the left is a pull with your right hand on your opponent's arm. As you pull, you force the circle and take your step; you *also* get the opponent to bring his left leg forward before his anchor leg has moved into position. This is twice as good for you, because he's a little off balance and you've made your step into position. His leg is yours.

by Steve McCardell

And it's important to understand that this step is used for every shot. You can single-leg, double-leg, barrel roll, fireman, etc. In fact, I revolutionized my career using Just One Step with the fireman's carry. Picture the set-up I just showed you: you've pulled on your opponent's arm, forcing him to step one leg in close to the very arm you must have control of (because you just directed him with it!). For instance, if I use my right hand to pull his left arm, I force his left leg to step a little closer, and meanwhile my right foot (my anchor foot) has made its move into position by my left. Holding tight to his left arm, I have an easy shot at his left leg, and can throw

Just One Step

him right into the fireman's carry. When I began using this technique, I began winning by pin in almost every one of my matches. My shot was seldom stopped, and with the carry, I had opponent's quickly to their backs. And anyone can use the same technique.

And that, as they say, is that.

I mean, that's really that. That's all there is to revolutionizing the shot, and in my opinion, whole wrestling teams. Again, there is no question for me that Pat Milkovich offered much to the Rochester Adams wrestling team that brought it such success. He was a motivator by simple virtue of how much his wrestlers respected him. As a two-time NCAA

by Steve McCardell

champion, he obviously knew all the moves that a wrestler could hope to learn from a coach. But by seeing how things all came together, I also believe that Just One Step was the needed revolution both for me and for the team.

And it can mean the needed revolution for you.

About the Author

Steve McCardell wrestled under the direction of Coach Milkovich for two years before transferring to a school in Pennsylvania, where he took second place in the state finals during his senior year.

In his college years he helped to coach a middle school team, and later, when he began teaching English at the Pennsylvania high school where he wrestled, he took part as assistant wrestling coach as well.

Today Steve is a freelance writer for both individuals and businesses. He produces books and a great deal of corporate writing. You can contact Steve by writing to him:

steve@mccardellwrite.com

About Patrick Milkovich

Patrick Milkovich has been teaching and coaching for over twenty-six years. He has taught both Health at the high school level and Physical Education at all levels, and is a certified Human Sexuality Instructor. He also designed and implemented Winners' Circle, a leadership/role modeling, substance abuse prevention/intervention program for athletes in Michigan. He was recently inducted into the National Wrestling Hall of Fame.

Patrick and his wife, Carol, are co-founders of L.E.A.D.E.R.S. — a program they implement in middle and high schools nationwide that educates students about the importance of being positive leaders and role models in their schools and communities. For more information, www.leadersprogram.org.