

NCAA Wrestling Championship

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Yianni Diakomihalis

Derek White

Myles Martin

Bo Nickal

Jason Nolf

Press Conference



choices, then if he wants to change schools, that's kind of on him. For me I felt like choosing Penn State was the best decision I've ever made. So I kind of never looked back from there.

YIANNI DIAKOMIHALIS: Kind of the same thing. I think that sometimes people make decisions that they regret or they didn't fully understand what was going on when they made the decision. And I get that. And obviously I would never leave Cornell. I love it at Cornell.

But I do understand there are circumstances where people want to or need to transfer, even beyond wrestling. There's more to it. There's life decisions, and I get that. So if someone feels like they need to leave their school and go somewhere else and they have a valid reason, then that's fine with me.

DEREK WHITE: As a competitor, you've gotta do whatever is best for you. I actually transferred from Nebraska to Oklahoma State. And that was probably the best thing I could have done so, yeah.

Q. Bo, could you talk a little bit about the change in weight class and if there were any challenges for you, because your results have been very good? And, also, just the ability of you to pin people has been really on display this year in your competitions. Talk a little bit about, in your mindset, how you're able to get in the position where you're able to get so many pins.

BO NICKAL: Well, the change of weight was something that, I think, just kind of happened naturally. I don't like cutting weight too much. I moved up from 74 to 84 and 84 to 97. So it's something that I've never really been afraid of.

And I think that it was good just for my body, not having to cut weight this year and stuff is nice. And it's made things more enjoyable. As far as getting pins and stuff like that, that's just something that I've always done. It's something that I just look for. And I feel like it's just a great testament to my coaches and the people that have raised me.

Growing up, my dad always really reinforced that, and it was something that was a big deal to him. And personally I just enjoy scoring a lot of points for my

THE MODERATOR: From your left to right, we're joined by Bo Nickal from Penn State, Jason Nolf from Penn State, Yianni Diakomihalis from Cornell, Myles Martin from Ohio State and Derek White from Oklahoma State. Questions?

Q. Myles, this is the first year you've really gone from the hunter to the hunted. Has that changed your approach at all in how you wrestle?

MYLES MARTIN: No, I'm just going to continue to wrestle and just kind of keep it simple and just compete as hard as I can. Nothing really changes. Just treat it like any other match or tournament.

Q. Jason, you're a local guy from Kittanning. I was wondering what you think about having the championships here in your backyard. It's become almost a hub now for wrestling and a lot of great wrestlers came out of this area.

JASON NOLF: It's cool. A lot of friends and family can come watch. But, again, like Myles said, it's just another tournament and we're here to compete. Doesn't really matter where we're at. We're going to compete at our best level. So that's what we're focused on.

Q. College wrestling has had a lot of transfers as you well know. Also, like at Penn State and Oklahoma State, guys that were two-time all-Americans weren't even good enough to make this, the varsity for the postseason. Is what's happening with college wrestling, do you ever feel like it's limited, that guys are being forced to transfer? And is transferring good for the sport right now?

BO NICKAL: That's something that I've never really thought about personally because I love where I'm at. I feel like at the end of the day if a kid isn't happy with his

team. So that's the best thing I can do for my team. And I try to do that every match.

Q. Jason, everybody says you're going to win. You're going to be a three-time champion. And it's assumed that you're going to win. How do you overcome that assumption and wrestle at your best?

JASON NOLF: I don't really think I have to overcome that assumption, but I'm not focused on what others are saying and what other people think. I'm focusing on my first match and I take it one at a time. I think when you start thinking about what other people think it becomes a distraction. And I don't think anybody deserves anything. I think you have to go earn it. And that's what I'm looking forward to do.

Q. Bo, last tournament of your college career, and more than just Bo, but does it feel any different, the emotions? I know you're probably locked in, ready to go like normal, but is there a different feeling now knowing that it's kind of at the end?

BO NICKAL: Coming into this, I thought there would be a different feeling, but there really hasn't been a different feeling. I think that just has a lot to do with the fact that I'm going to continue to compete after this. This isn't my last time ever wrestling, so I've got a lot more matches to go, a lot more tournaments to go. I'm just excited for the opportunity like every single match that I get.

Q. Yianni, you're surrounded by seniors up on the stage; you're the only sophomore. In the way that you won your national title last year, overcoming an ACL tear during the tournament, coming back this year and being healthier, did that kind of change your perspective on wrestling at all, like, hey, although I may have more tournaments left than these guys, this tournament, any tournament could be my last? Did that kind of change anything for you?

YIANNI DIAKOMIHALIS: Honestly for me getting hurt last year -- it's the first time I've ever thought about it being career-ending, by the way -- but for me I feel like it just showed me that anytime you're facing something or it's not going the way you want it to or the way you thought it would, that you can overcome it. And at least I could overcome it. And it was good confidence for me.

It was like if I could do that with a torn ACL I could do anything healthy. It was good for my confidence almost being able to do it when I was hurt.

Q. Derek, coming into the year, there was a lot of talk about heavyweight division obviously with the departure of Kyle Snyder and Adam Coon. Who

could step up and fill that role? (Indiscernible) on the year, wins over the ACC, Big Ten, (indiscernible) champ. Do you still feel like you're kind of slept on when people talk about who could win this weight?

DEREK WHITE: I don't worry about what other people are thinking. Just go out there and take it one match at a time. That's all I can do.

Q. Yianni, we've had several questions from a couple fans on social media. And they want to know what your stance on blueberry waffles is and how it ranks among your top 10 breakfast foods?

YIANNI DIAKOMIHALIS: Pancakes are better than waffles. Just throwing that out there. And if I was going to have a pancake or a waffle, I would rather have it have like chocolate or peanut butter on it. And it's a stupid question. (Laughter)

Q. Bo and Jason, you guys are kind of the leaders for the Hodge Trophy, and I just wonder if there's a friendly competition between you two this seen going for it?

BO NICKAL: What are you talking about? The Hodge Trophy. I've heard of that, I think. But, no, I don't think that there's any, like, friendly competition. We're just both out there trying to do our best. Me at least. I don't know about you.

JASON NOLF: That's all we talk about. (Laughter)

Q. Myles, the Ohio State program the last couple of years has put out a number of (indiscernible), competitors, Kyle Snyder, yourself and guys kind of below you. How often do you get the time to maybe look back on maybe what your legacy is in the program and what you learned from those guys and kind of what you pass down to those guys? And does that ever kind of take you away from doing the very basic thing of, hey, I've got to win five matches this weekend?

MYLES MARTIN: I usually don't look back a whole lot. I just try to continue. I don't know, my life just goes on. As far as like the guys under me, like freshmen and stuff like that, I just help them whenever I feel like they want my help or if they come up to me ask for just questions about technique, I just do it because I love them and they're my teammates and brothers.

So it's not really hard to do it just because we're all kind of close. And Kyle, they all do that to me, Logan, those guys do that to me. I asked them for questions. And the little guys do that with me. I don't know, I don't reminisce or think about it or try to put pressure on myself in a sense where I have to compete for myself. I'm kind of selfless in the sense.

I think it helps making our team better. A lot of guys on our team are pretty selfless. So it just helps, I think.

Q. Bo and Jason, Penn State has dominated this event throughout this decade with seven national championships. What is it about the culture and your program that allows that to happen?

BO NICKAL: I think we're just -- I can't really speak for other programs, but I know we're grateful for the opportunity to be here and we love to compete and we peak at the right time. And we're just ready to go. And I think that's all it is to it is, we want to compete because we want to and no other reason. And we want to win because we want to, no other reason.

Q. Derek, following up on that last question, it's kind of assumed that Penn State will win the team title. Oklahoma State is one of those that can threaten. Is that something you guys talk about? Is that something you guys are working toward?

DEREK WHITE: We're not really worried about that. Anything can happen this weekend. So, like I said, earlier take it one match at a time and wrestle to us. That's all I've got.

Q. Bo and Myles, one thing that's unique about this sport is you can get two guys who have had a past with each other, both positives and negatives. Do each of you, when you leave your career, will you ever think about those moments? Do you look at each other differently? How does the sport allow this to happen? Do you take it personal?

BO NICKAL: I think that when you get to wrestle a great competitor it's just exciting. That's the matches that I get most excited for, when I'm wrestling good competition and stuff. I'm just appreciative of that. Being able to wrestle the best wrestlers in the world is something that excites me. And that's something that -- that's the reason I do it because it's fun.

And it's one thing to just go out and throw a guy down and pin him but that's not really as satisfying as wrestling somebody that's a good competitor and that's more fun to me. So I think that's something that I'll appreciate.

MYLES MARTIN: Yeah, I agree with him. I think I just appreciate wrestling really good guys. And it's always exciting just for the fans as well for you guys and for just people who just really have a lot of respect for this sport, and I respect it as well. I don't look at it as like a negative situation because it's wrestling and I like to keep it simple. It's not like life-changing stuff.

But, yeah, I just have a lot of respect for the sport and a lot of respect for my opponent. Especially when I wrestle really good wrestlers, it's just fun and exciting.

Q. Derek and Jason, you both mentioned that you're just focused on the first match. When the brackets come out, we fans and media go crazy. We love it, eat it up, spend a bunch of hours poring through all the possible matchups. Do either of you allow yourself to look beyond that first match in the bracket to see who you might face in the round two or the quarterfinals?

DEREK WHITE: No, I really don't look forward later in the bracket. You never know what's going to happen. I just take it one match at a time.

JASON NOLF: Yeah, what he said.

Q. One of the more unique things about wrestling is you've got the individual part of it but also the team part of it. So during the tournament, just curious if you're so locked in on your own stuff or if you're paying any attention to the team standings or anything like that, whether it's Penn State or Ohio State or Oklahoma State, just how that's working? How much do you, I guess, during the tournament, if Ohio State's got a chance to win the national title as a team. Are you tracked into that or are you just kind of locked in on to your next opponent, that sort of thing?

MYLES MARTIN: I usually just take it one match at a time, just like Derek said. You can't really focus on what -- the things that you can't control. You can control how you prepare for your match and what you can do for yourself and then hopefully that accumulates for the team. So it's hard to say.

JASON NOLF: I think we just focused on going out there and scoring as many points as possible ourselves and that's the best thing that you can do for your team. Kind of like Myles said. When you start to focus on other things you can't control, you kind of lose energy and focus.

As long as you focus on your next match and go out and try to score points they start to add up eventually.

DEREK WHITE: Same thing he said.

Q. Guys, first time ever went to the nationals it was just amazing. I think there's a lot of wrestling fans that know what the nationals mean. But what does it mean to you? This event is so special -- five matches and you're a champion. Explain some of your feelings of how you feel especially on a Saturday night?

BO NICKAL: Well, I've been coming to the nationals since I think maybe like since I was in the sixth or seventh grade. It's something I enjoyed whether I was competing or watching. There's a lot of energy in the

arena and it's just exciting times for wrestling.

If you see 20,000 people getting ready for one place for just one night, that's pretty awesome just to see that, the fans and how much they enjoy it. For me that's where I want to be at the end -- that's my favorite place to be is just with the pressure on, lights on, and that's just something that has been really exciting for me to have done. And I'm just very grateful for those opportunities.

JASON NOLF: Like you know it's time for a big night whenever you start to feel all the jitters and you start to feel nervous and a lot of people think that's a bad thing. But for me I feel spirited whenever it comes to national tournament.

I really love this tournament. It's where we're supposed to peak and I think we do as a team and as individuals and we're just looking forward to competing.

Q. Yianni, why do you love wrestling?

YIANNI DIAKOMIHALIS: There's a lot to that. But I think that it's something -- it's been my whole life. I started wrestling when I was six. I'm 19 now. I've been wrestling more than I've been not wrestling, and I think it's the pursuit of something greater. You know what I mean? It's the pursuit of being better than I was the day before and being better than -- everything I do I just want to be great at the things that I take pride in.

And there's nothing I take more pride in than this. And therefore I pretty much have dedicated my life to it. And it's something that I honestly couldn't put into words why I love it. But I do. And I couldn't not love it now.

Q. Jason, growing up in this area, which has become such a hotbed for wrestling, what was the benefit of that as a kid just not having to travel all over the place to find great competition?

JASON NOLF: So I drove about an hour and a half back and forth to practice every day because I kind of live an hour from here but I would drive to Franklin Regional or Latrobe to practice. And one benefit is I think there are amazing coaches everywhere.

But the biggest thing for me, I think, was finding really good partners and coaches to facilitate that. And I had amazing coaches in (indiscernible) and Coach Waller and Isaac Greeley, but there were so many partners, I know like Cameron Shields, Veruca, Krivus, Pletcher -- I could name a million people.

But I think that's our generation kind of grew up with each other and we're always competing against each other. I think that's why that group of guys kind of became so good is because we had each other.

Q. Jason, going back to your year-long competition with Bo for the Hodge, the other thing people have been talking about is the Penn State pins record that you have right now. I believe you're up three on Bo right now. Do you think you need one or two more in this tournament to secure that or do you think you have it in the bag?

JASON NOLF: I would need at least probably five.

Q. Bo, any chance to catch him?

BO NICKAL: Well, I have five matches. He's only up three. So, if he gets five and I get five, I'm not very good at math, but, yeah.

(Laughter)

Q. Yianni, we were talking about the brackets coming out and everybody looks at them. Aside from 41, do you look at this as a fan at all and look at the brackets and what might happen? And if so, do you have a favorite weight class other than 41?

YIANNI DIAKOMIHALIS: This was much harder for me last year because as a kid I watched nationals every year. I grew up watching NCAAs. It's what I did. Brackets came out, it's, like, oh, let's see who's wrestling. I remember last year brackets came out and I started doing it. And I'm, like, I've got to stop; I'm in the tournament now. You know what I mean?

So second time through I have a better idea of it. But obviously I like to see how my Cornell guys are going to do and where our guys sit in the bracket. But once it starts I'm not going to put any mind to it. Just let it play out as it goes and see how that goes for me.

Q. Yianni, obviously you assess your wrestling; you're very specific to what it takes to win. How much better do you feel you've gotten in the last year? And talk about the challenge of continuing to improve, because no one sits still in wrestling, right?

YIANNI DIAKOMIHALIS: I mean, I'd like to think I've been getting better. We have tournaments like these to see if that's true or not. And for me, I guess, it's a challenge, but it's not, because it's something that I want to do. It's not like I have to force myself to want to get better.

The difficult part is actually getting better. And finding the little things that you're doing wrong and being very self-critical. And I think it's something I just enjoy, I don't know why, I just really enjoy analyzing what I do and thinking about what I do and trying to get better results for myself.

So I wouldn't say it's a challenge as much as it is

something I look forward to doing and look forward to finding things I can work on.

Q. Bo, my hearing is still bad from last year's finals. Have you ever heard a louder crowd than you ignited at Cleveland last year?

BO NICKAL: Honestly, I didn't really hear much. I just went and kind of wanted to go run over and hug my coaches. That was an awesome moment and something that I'm appreciative of. But as far as louder crowds, I don't even really know. That was kind of all a blur. It all happened really quickly. Maybe Rec Hall a few times. It gets pretty loud in there. But that's about it.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.