

NCAA Division I Wrestling Championships
March 19, 2014
Student-Athlete Quotes

Iowa's Tony Ramos

On what the NCAA Championships mean:

"I'm actually not a big fan of making dual matches count towards the end of the year. I like the national tournament and how things are now. The sport is growing. Dual meets need to build up more matchups between guys. Build up the matchups between the number one and number two guys. You need to build up the athletes themselves. Have media build up matchups before they even start."

On a potential matchup with A.J. Schopp:

"I don't think he closed the gap at all. I made a couple of mistakes and I gave myself a chance to win the match at the end, I just let him walk out of bounds. There are a lot of weaknesses that we have noticed in watching film on him and if I do wrestle him in the semis, I think I'll exploit that a lot."

On the boost in confidence winning the Big Ten title gave him:

"I think the boost it gave me is just getting over the hump and not coming in second all the time. It was a relief and it was a weight lifted off my shoulders. I think it's going to let me open up here and be a lot tougher and just let it fly coming into this tournament."

On helping the younger guys know what to expect:

"They are tough guys, they are real tough guys. I just keep reminding them that, you guys are competing with us and there's no reason you should be getting beat by 25 pounders. Clark is tough; he is really tough. I think he can get going and we are really excited about him. Anything can happen and he just needs to keep his head straight. We need to keep him going the right way. At Big Tens he suffered that loss and he was just worried about that semifinal for the rest of the tournament and what he did and wrong and what he could have done differently on the mat. He just has to keep his head going forward and the things he wants to happen will happen."

Minnesota's Tony Nelson

On staying positive after losses this year:

"The Big Ten schedule, especially at heavyweight, has a lot of great guys. Eight of the top 10 are there. Once you get or suffer a loss it can get in your head a little bit and January was a rough month for me. I got some extra time off and was able to get some time in the room and fix some things. That got my head back on track. Nothing is going to come to you at the NCAA Tournament, you have to work for it. I'm excited."

On deciding the order of the finals later in the tournament:

"It's a little different than last year but you have to be able to wrestle whenever. A full day sitting around is not really going to make a big difference; wherever you wrestle you have to be ready to make a difference. Viewer-wise people are going to watch, like I said, it's the national finals."

Oklahoma's Kendric Maple

On moving up a weight class:

“Just a scenery change. I looked at the Olympic weights and wanted to get bigger for that. I wasn't the highest for that and I wanted to not think about weight and just go out and have fun and enjoy wrestling. It's been fun.”

On what would be considered a success:

“I think everybody just performing to their best abilities. We had one guy get cauliflower nose, not sure how that happened. We've had some adversity, but we're all healthy now and we're ready to go. The sky's the limit, and who knows what's going to happen? We know what our goal is.”

On staying positive after losses this year:

“I have a great support system at Oklahoma. I have a great family and all the fans really support me and I believe in God and that has really helped me through all the losses and dealing with adversity. Right now it's 0-0 going into this tournament.”

On if he has a preference in who he wrestles:

“I don't really have a preference. Obviously there are tough guys and I just have to be ready to wrestle whoever steps out on the mat. I have to use my style and not go into the style of whoever I am wrestling in the match with me. I think in the end it is just whoever shows up and performs.”

On the challenges of moving up another weight class:

“I would say just getting my weight up to 49 and keeping it up there. I had some times where it was down close to 141 at times. Just knowing that weight isn't an issue and going out there and being faster and being everything else technically, I think we have overcome that.”

Oklahoma State's Chris Perry

On being the last Smith/Perry to wrestle at Oklahoma State:

“We actually have another one coming up. Coach's son is coming up in another year or two so I won't be the last. It's good to have it in OKC. I think it was in 2006 when my brother was here. I think he was third. I think he went up a weight. It's good but it's another tournament and that's how we look at it. We don't make it out to be more than it is.”

On staying positive after losses this year:

“I think all great wrestlers know that the big tournaments are the ones that matter. It doesn't matter what happens during the year. If you win here, everyone forgets about those losses and I think all great wrestlers know that.”

On deciding the order of the finals later in the tournament:

“Same thing, the order doesn’t matter to me. I’ve wrestled first and I’ve wrestled last in tournaments and it just doesn’t matter. You have to step out there and perform either way.”

On the new seeding system:

“I haven’t (given any thought to it). Every round here can be tough if you are not focused and ready to go. It doesn’t matter what seed it is. Last year I think I had five of them that were close. It doesn’t matter what round it is, if you are not ready to go, you are going to get beat.”

On a potential matchup with OU’s Andrew Howe here in OKC:

“It’s good, but it’s what I said. You can’t make a matchup that is not a match. Everyone might want to see it but you can’t make it. It’s not there yet. You have to take one match at a time and get ready. If we meet up again, so be it. I’ll be excited.

Penn State’s David Taylor

On coping with the expectations and pressure:

“It’s not necessarily pressure -- it’s an opportunity. We have an opportunity to go out there and do some special things. Like Tony (Ramos) said, we have 10 guys on our team and 10 guys at nationals and ten guys who can go out and compete and do something we’ve wanted to do our whole lives. If you think about it, no matter how you shape it, we’re just excited. This is the national championship. It’s something that happens once a year. For me, this is the last one, and I’ve gone out and wrestled my whole life.”

On going through the journey with teammate Ed Ruth:

“I guess the biggest thing is thinking back to how grateful I am that I chose Penn State and how grateful I am that Ed Ruth and I are on the same team at the same time and having each other and pushing each other the last four years. I can start naming guys that have contributed to the success of our team and it’d be an endless list. I’m just really lucky to be around a lot of great people. I think Ed and I both and every other guy, we just want to go out and enjoy the times we have to compete this weekend. I think good things are going to happen for us.”

On what the NCAA Championships mean:

“I think duals says a lot about the team and matching up against one other team and determining who the best team is. But wrestling is growing. There were over 10,000 people at the Big Ten wrestling championships. I think national championships and that kind of stuff should be decided from the biggest fans, and I think whatever we’re doing is working right now and I don’t see a reason to change that.”

On deciding the order of the finals later in the tournament:

“I think that it’s good for wrestling if you have exciting matches throughout the finals, but with that said, it’s the NCAA finals. You don’t need to change the order that often. It’s been set for a really long time and you have great competitors at every single weight, but it just adds a little something extra when you are wrestling to try and be that last match. It’s pretty exciting and it’s something that you don’t forget.”

On the pressure of being on of the last undefeated favorites:

“I have been wrestling for a really long time and, like every single guy here, you envision yourself here, in a big team race and getting your hand raised in front of a lot of people. I think every great competitor enjoys that. That’s one thing about being at Penn State – people’s eyes are always on you and I have had eyes on me for my entire career. It is just something I can’t think too much about and I just have to focus on what I’ve been doing for my entire life – going out there and shaking hands and then wrestling as hard as I can for seven minutes and then shake the guy’s hand and walk off and be ready for the next one. I have five matches left to do that and that is all I can really focus on at this point.”

Iowa Head Coach Tom Brands

Opening Statement:

“We’re excited to be here, and there’s no question about that. We’ve got to be tough for three days and I think that’s a pretty comprehensive formula across the board for all of our guys. They believe and we believe in them.”

On the seeding:

“Here’s the thing -- with the qualifying rules changed, there’s no question that the brackets are deeper. I don’t look at it as they did anything wrong. I think they put some weight in some areas on some guys. I think they did the best job they can do. It’s tough. Are there any clear-cut number one’s out there? I think there were some, but there’s always an argument for the two guy to be number one or in (Iowa State’s Kyven) Gadson’s case, the five guy. I think they have a reason of what they did, and I think it was purely motivated.”

On Iowa opening eyes at the Big Ten tournament:

“We feel good about ourselves. We feel good about our team as coaches. I don’t know how many eyes we opened at the Big Ten, not to be in disagreement, but Tony Ramos talks a bigger game than I talk. He’s a confident guy. Opening eyes would’ve been slamming that door on Sunday in the final rounds. We were close, but close doesn’t get it done. I think Tony is confident, I think our team is confident and that’s how you win tournaments. There’s no room for a letup. We’ve got to be strong in six sessions of wrestling.”

On the amount of parity in Division I wrestling:

"It's absolutely great for the sport and it's very exciting when you're a part of a program that's trying to be the best and you're challenged every week in the Big Ten and you go outside of the program to Stillwater or Edinboro or Ames, Iowa, or somewhere out west that's going to try to knock you off as well. I think it's very exciting and it heartens us to the battle. We love it."

Oklahoma Head Coach Mark Cody

Opening Statement:

"Nice to have this event here in Oklahoma. We're happy to be here. We've qualified eight, and it's nice for our fans to be able to not have to travel and come here. It's accessible, and we're just excited to be here and get ready to roll tomorrow."

On the seeding:

"I think that when the seedings came out, I had people tell me 'Boy, you guys kind of got hammered on the seedings,' but I think the way we look at it you get the seed you get and then you prepare. That was our focus. I didn't really notice one way or the other. At the same time, with the new formula I'm sure they're probably tweaking things out. I don't think anything was intentional, but it would be nice to know the process. I think they try to be as fair as possible."

On what would be considered a success:

"Like everybody else, you're never happy unless you're No. 1. To come out of here with a trophy, just particularly with some of the hard luck we've had this season and again, you don't see a coach say we've lost this match because we were hurt or banged up. With everybody being back in the lineup and being healthy, to come out of here with a trophy, I'd leave with a smile on my face."

On not determining finals order until Friday night:

"At Big 12s, they decided to do that this year with the Howe and Perry match, and boy the atmosphere after that match was electric in the gym. It was just awesome. Unfortunately, we [Oklahoma] were on the losing end of it, but it was just a great idea to do that in the end, and I think the fans walk out feeling great instead of having that match even at 74 and then the next couple of matches roll around, and they're not as excited at the end. So I think it's a really great idea. It helps promote the sport and make it fan-friendly and more fun."

On the difficulty of preparing for nationals with one day of conference championships:

"I agree (with OSU's John Smith). I would like a two-day event also. It would be nice to have a bigger conference. I think a two-day event coming in here, particularly two weigh-ins and the more tournament situations you can get into before the NCAAs and a lot of times with us trying to get in as many dual meets as we can during the season, sometimes it's not very feasible for that to happen. I agree; I would love for us to get in a two-day meet worked out."

On the amount of parity in Division I wrestling:

“There’s a lot of great coaches out there right now, a lot of great hires being made, and it surely is making things difficult. Of course, as Tom (Brands) mentioned, it’s nice to be able to go out and wrestle other people outside of your conference that have very good teams. It gives you great competition. I think it’s great for the sport. The more good coaches that we get out there, the better off we are. Right now you see, more than you ever have in the sport, a lot of coaches have figured out how to get their guys ready. They’re out there recruiting and just doing a great job. It surely does a lot for our sport.”

Minnesota Head Coach J Robinson

Opening Statement:

“I think it’s pretty much the same for all the coaches in that this is the one thing we all look forward to as coaches and as competitors. What’s going to happen is going to happen like every national championship we’ve ever been to. There’s going to be a lot of highs and a lot of lows, but it’s going to be fun for all the fans and everyone else.”

On the start of the season:

“I think that when we came back after the scuffle, we looked at in one way and it’s just an anomaly that happens. I went to one tournament where the team lost 17 in a row and never won one and they’ve won national titles since there. You think it’s an anomaly and then it happens twice, so we went back and changed some things this past week. I think we kind of lost our focus a bit, so there’s some things we’re going to do different in the next three days to try and rectify that.”

On the seeding:

“The thing that I would want to know more than anything else is, I believe in transparency. I think the Big Ten coaches do a great job because we rank it and then we put it up and see how everybody ranked it. I think the committee and the people who do it owe an explanation to why it’s done. If it isn’t done the right way we can’t correct it. I think it needs to be transparent. I don’t understand how (Iowa State’s) Kyven Gadson is a five. All through the year you’re looking at who has wrestled and one tournament he doesn’t lose. I think that’s the most glaring one. I think there’s an explanation owed to the coaches and the people so you can see if it’s really valid. Not to know it, that’s the question I really have.”

On not determining finals order until Friday night:

“I’d say the same thing. If you look at anything that you do, you always save the best for last; wrestling shouldn’t be any different. In the arts, the best artist sings at the end, and that’s what everybody stays around to watch. That’s what we want and we want them involved. I think it’s a great idea.”

On why the same format is not used in dual matches:

"I don't know if you can by NCAA rules. You either have to draw, I might be wrong here, but you either have to draw or start at 125. I don't think you have—I'm not sure of the rule, you'd have to ask these guys here."

On the amount of parity in Division I wrestling:

"I think a lot of it has to do with perspective. I think like a lot of things in wrestling; it depends on how far you go back. Just being old, these guys get tired of hearing it; you've seen it 10 years ago, 15 years ago. It kind of ebbs and flows; there's a lot of parity, then it goes away for a little bit, then it comes back. Regardless of what it does, it is good. We had a little meeting with some of the coaches this morning, and we were talking about some other things and one of the things that John said is that the parity does good because whether you win or lose, you get people talking. When you get people talking, they get engaged and when they get engaged, they pull other people into the conversation. That is a very big plus for wrestling, that the more things that are happening around the country, especially with technology, everybody's watching who's getting beaten, what it'll do to the seeds. It gets people to talk and when they talk, it grows. I see it as a huge plus for wrestling."

Penn State's Cael Sanderson

Opening Statement:

"Just like everyone else, we're excited and grateful for this opportunity. Definitely think we're ready to go but we'll find that out over the next three days. I think this is the best wrestling event of the year, every year and we're happy to be here."

Coach Sanderson on the seeding:

"It is what it is at this point. You've got to win five matches, some have to win six to be a champion, and that's what we're focused on. It's not a time for us to worry about how things happen. If you look at all the weight classes there were definitely strange seeds, but I don't know why that is but you have to make do."

On not determining finals order until Friday night:

"I think it makes sense. They're following the models of other combat sports, obviously boxing and MMA, and why not? The sport had great success with it last year."

On the amount of parity in Division I wrestling:

"I agree, I think the parity is great. It takes time. Not too long ago, I think you only had three teams with a chance to win. Now, I think there are 10 or 15 that think they can win and have the resources to do so. It takes time. I think that something we should do as a sport is to continue to create parity. There's a vast difference between the top 10 and the bottom 10. Parity is definitely strength for our sport."

On his initial reaction to the draws:

"I didn't think anything of it. I got some emails about it; you guys forwarded it to me, just so I was aware of them. It's the national tournament; you have to be good wrestlers to win the nationals. You could pick your draw and not wrestle anyone tough ever, but it's just not the reality of it. I don't think it's a big deal. The team that scores the most points wins, same thing with every match. It's a simple sport, simple philosophy. Everybody has tough draws. The other thing too, you motivate people by challenging them. You motivate people by challenging them. You challenged us, so thank you."

Oklahoma State's John Smith

Opening Statement:

"We're excited. Like Mark (Cody) said, driving down the road here makes it real easy for us. Sometimes that translates into great wrestling. We have to get focused, and we have to wrestle our best three days that we've wrestled all year. I do believe we'll see that out of our team. We're excited about being here and wrestling some of our best. It was a great season for wrestling. I can't remember a season like this. Obviously a lot of things went good and some went wrong but it created a great season as we head into nationals here."

On the seeding:

"What do you judge it by? Do you judge it by the Internet and who's rankings are on (there). I think they did their homework and probably one or two guys. What'd they seed, 16? One hundred and sixty athletes, there's probably a few that could have went either way. Overall, I looked at it and it looks pretty good. From the standpoint of people who didn't like their seeds, they're looking at someone who's doing the seeding who really didn't do their homework."

On his team's effort in the tournament:

"Well, for us I think that we're going to have to make sure that our strong guys perform well, and then we're going to have to have some guys that aren't ranked very well right now, come through. I do believe that, as Tom [Brand] was saying, they're deep brackets and deep may mean that 16 or 17 guys that can come through and find a place in the top eight. That's what we're going to have to do. We have several guys that are ranked from 10 to 16 and you're not going to win unless several of those guys finish one through eight. For us, I do believe we're going to see our best wrestling. We could wrestle really well and not win, or we can wrestle great and give ourselves a chance. I think that's what we did last year; we wrestled great and gave ourselves a chance."

On not determining finals order until Friday night:

"I think it's a great idea, I think we ought to continue to do it. There's highlight matches, and we need to try to expose those highlight matches at the right time."

On why the same format is not used in dual matches:

"I'm not sure if we can, but I like your idea. It's probably something that wouldn't be too hard to submit to a rule change, to choose the weight class to wrestle at the end. It might be the highlight of the evening."

On the difficulty of preparing for nationals with one day of conference championships:

"I don't like it. I think I've voiced my opinion. I like what we did last year, and I was voted down on it this year. There's a possibility of some things happening in some conferences as we go forward from here. I don't think a one-day tournament does much for you, especially if you're not wrestling that month and then the one-day competition doesn't give you every advantage to wrestle your best. I don't think it's a disadvantage, but I don't think it gives you every advantage to wrestle your best. I'd like to see a two-day event for qualifiers but we'd have to bring in more teams."

On the amount of parity in Division I wrestling:

"Well I think they've said just about everything. The only thing I'd add is that it's here, and we've seen it coming for several years. It goes back to what Cael (Sanderson) just said. It goes back to the resources for our programs. They're a lot of programs putting resources into wrestling because they know they have the opportunity to have an All-American or two. I think we're going to see it more and more as we go forward from here. I think we've got some great coaches here that are working hard at it and with tuition and fees going up, money does make a difference in recruiting and people are choosing places because of that. With all that, I can continue to see it getting tighter and tighter."