

# University of Iowa Wrestling Media Conference

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Iowa City, Iowa, USA

## Tom Brands

### Men's Wrestling Press Conference



TOM BRANDS: Fans are going to be relying on the media because there aren't going to be fans in the arena, so you guys have a big job to do: sending the message of Iowa Hawkeye wrestling.

Terry Brands is here, Larry Lee is here, and the real show is in a little bit, honoring Spencer Lee for the Hodge Trophy. We have Brian and Mike here, they're the genesis of that. I'll introduce them when we're done.

Fire away. Let's get this show on the road.

**Q. Normally wrestlers have 20, 30 matches going into a national tournament. This year they'll have 10 or 11. Is there a number that athletes need to have to compete at the highest level?**

TOM BRANDS: I think you train your body and your mind and your spirit to the point where nothing really matters. Things happen that upset the apple cart. You could have a regular season that's normal and only end up with wrestling in the qualifier, for instance, and have to go to the national tournament.

You take it and you do the best you can with it. When you have an edge, you'll be okay.

**Q. Outside of a national championship, you guys have all the pieces back from a year ago except for one. How do you improve or surpass what the team was able to accomplish a year ago?**

TOM BRANDS: You get to the end, and that would have been in my introduction, but I was saving it for my segue into introducing the Hodge Trophy. But the bottom line is you go out there and you do your job. You do your job.

**Q. Jaydin Eierman, how does he kind of fit in to the lineup, the puzzle for this year?**

TOM BRANDS: I mean, here's the thing. You have to get to the end. We have new pieces. We have new pieces that are old faces. You could argue that Spencer Lee is

better than he's ever been. That's a scary thing. He has to go out and prove that, show that off. So that's probably the first thing.

You talk about the new faces like Eierman, absolutely. But you don't get to Carter Happel, Murin moving up to 141, I think he was listed at 41. You get into the specifics of the lineup.

Really we have to get to the end. We have to get to the national tournament. Are you listening, NCAA? Are you listening? These are young people that aspire to things. They're in an age demographic that is not as risky. It's always risky. It's risky when I drive from here to the arena, I might get sideswiped by a bus because I'm not looking.

We have to get to the end this year. Then we have to get to Tokyo. I'm passionate about that. It cannot go down the way it went down a year ago. So here we are in January. We're starting. We thank the Big Ten. We have a schedule, and away we go.

We do it every day. We're diligent. Every one of those guys in that Hawkeye wrestling room, they do it right. They wear their mask, screen in, doing daily testing. Before that they were doing weekly testing.

Even if they have a negative test and they don't feel right, have a cough or throat issue, they stay away. They're doing it right. We have to get to the end.

**Q. USA Wrestling sponsored events. Did you learn anything of their events? There's been a couple college duels canceled because of COVID, otherwise wrestling has done well.**

TOM BRANDS: Wrestling is done well. It started with the rooftop thing in Chicago. Good job. Awesome. That kind of started it. Then you had a Flo event. We had our own event. USA Wrestling put on a big event. We had fans. It was right here in the Mecca of wrestling in the United States. It wasn't anywhere but Iowa. It wasn't anywhere except Coralville, Iowa.

There's a lot of good people, starting with our administration, going to Josh Chamberger, our own program. They're advocates for getting this thing going and keeping it going, keeping it going the right way.

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They're advocates for that.

**Q. A lot of people outside of wrestling were concerned, because it's such a man-to-man sport, it would be the one hardest to get going. Why has wrestling gone so well?**

TOM BRANDS: First of all, you sterilize yourself when you take a shower. We've been dealing with this forever, skin issues, whatever, without getting into details.

You sterilize the mats on a daily basis, more than one time a day if you're on the mat more than one time a day. We've been doing that before the pandemic. Wrestling is way ahead. It's a one-on-one sport with a referee. It's not five-on-five or 11-on-11.

Here's the thing. To compare us to other sports, silliness. To compare other sports to other sports, silliness. Wrestling has a lot of experience of being very, very clean.

**Q. How much did not getting to the end motivate this team this year?**

TOM BRANDS: I think our guys think of these things as individuals. That's one of the greatest things we have. We have a great group that's tight, they're together. We've had to be together as a country, as a world, through this pandemic. Our guys have come together, as well, through that.

They dealt with it in their own ways. When that message came down, they handled it. They've been handling it ever since. We got in that wrestling room on June 8th. Our administration, we were front line, we were a trial program along with maybe a hospital program, one other sport, maybe somewhere else on campus. There were three or four entities on campus that were the front line trial. Wrestling was one of them because of the discipline of wrestlers, because of how wrestlers handle adversity, maybe because of how our team handled adversity, and the leadership we had.

Back then it was Kemerer, Marinelli and Lee and company, then all of a sudden it became Lugo, Marinelli and Lee because Lugo won a Big Ten championship, Lugo graduates. Now we have Lee, Marinelli, Kemerer, Cassioppi, DeSanto, Murin, Eierman.

You see guys making progress, like Nelson Brands, Abe Assad. They're going to be head-to-head again. There are great things going on. There are great things going on because of how they handle themselves on a daily basis through whatever.

To us, it's not even to me, to us, the battle is on a daily basis. Your awareness and your energy doesn't rise because all of a sudden now there's a pandemic in your life. It's the same. It's the same battle. It's steady. It's steady.

We're going to be okay, but you have to get us to the end. We did it your way. Now you have to come our way. These are young people. We know this is serious business. We do it right.

**Q. Big Ten was one of the last conferences to announce a schedule. Were you ever concerned it wasn't going to happen?**

TOM BRANDS: I mean, you have faith in your leadership. Like my daily conversations with my bosses, Barbara Burke and Gary Barta, the schedule will come when the schedule comes. They weren't controlling that.

The biggest thing that I could tell them was that our frustration isn't with you, our frustration is with the Big Ten as the leader in sports, let alone wrestling. It's definitely the leader in wrestling. Yet, you know, these other conferences have taken the lead.

That's what was frustrating. Not because we didn't think we weren't going to get a schedule or compete, but because the propaganda is used against us. You know what I'm talking about.

It's hard when the propaganda is going against you. They can say, Iowa is ducking institution X and institution Y. Well, we have a policy that we can't wrestle anybody outside the Big Ten until the national tournament. How are we ducking you?

That narrative was put out there by the nit, nit, nit minis of the world in the sport of wrestling. It hurt the Big Ten. That's my competitive edge coming out. That's where the frustration was. It wasn't with the Big Ten or the Big Ten leadership. This is real. This COVID is real. They're figuring it out every day. It's changing.

Oh, by the way, our Critical Incident Management Team, Andy Peterson is our team doctor, and he's front line, These are very, very smart people that are patient with us. So we have the best of all worlds. We have smart people working for us. We have great administration that understands that we understand the propaganda is being used against you. They're working, too.

We have a lot of good things going on where it's collective.

**Q. Can you comment on Spencer's dominance last**

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**season, what a Hodge winner does for a particular program.**

TOM BRANDS: The Hodge Trophy, there's no controversy on who the Hodge Trophy winner was in 2020. That shows the dominance. In other years there's been maybe where somebody feels like they got left out. This one was without a doubt. What were the points? 234 to 18 in points scored.

I'm going to say it again. I'm going to say it again, call out the media again. Then there was a published article, maybe this is to keep an edge, keep putting an edge on Spencer and the rest of our guys, the rest of our guys should be competing against Spencer in a healthy teammate way to go get that Hodge for themselves. Kemerer, Marinelli, DeSanto, Cassioppi, Murin, Young, Nelson, Warner, Assad, Eierman.

The other thing is Flo Wrestling, they publish an article that knocks Spencer because he scored X amount of points in the first period, and he only scored X amount of points in the second and third period. They didn't get out of the first period. The match never made it out of the first period. How do you score points in the second and third period?

I love it. I love it.

**Q. In these duals, will there be extra matches like some other teams are doing? Non-starters also get a chance to compete?**

TOM BRANDS: There are extra matches that are permissible this year that are countable. They will be wrestled in the same format as the rules of a seven-minute college match. There's a couple differences. But, yes, we can have extra matches.

That's important because we have a freshmen class that is high powered. We have Bretli Reyna, Jesse Ybarra, Cullan Schriever, Patrick Kennedy, Schroeder, Gabe Christenson. Those guys will be getting matches, as well.

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