

University of Iowa Wrestling Media Conference

Thursday, October 26, 2023

Iowa City, Iowa, USA

Tom Brands

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TOM BRANDS: As you know, we are in the middle of a situation here regarding sports wagering reinstatement. The Division I Council, President Baker, they're working hard to get it right. That's a good thing.

We know that November 8 we're going to know more, and we're hopeful that we'll have a decision then.

When you look at where we go from here now, it's about opportunities. It always is. Our guys, every one of them that you're going to see downstairs, have an opportunity.

We have a returning national runner-up. He leads the charge in our credentials, but I can tell you he wasn't happy, and that's probably where it starts from a performance point of view, if you're going to have that discussion.

If you keep talking about the November 8 decision, you have to credit the NCAA leadership for trying to get it right. You credit our administration for standing by us.

This has never been an issue where these guys have not been accountable. They've told the truth. They've been accountable. Let the punishment fit the crime.

That's where we're at with that.

That would be my opening statement. We can talk about this team if you want to.

Q. Do you have any thoughts or feelings about what will happen?



TOM BRANDS: I don't. I know that it's important. I know that it's a really good thing that this is being looked at carefully by everybody.

Q. Not knowing who's in, who's out, how has that impacted you throughout the off season and planning for this season?

TOM BRANDS: It never changes that you're wrestling, competing for a national team title, and individually it never changes that you're competing and wrestling for individual titles. That doesn't change how these guys operate.

It's natural to maybe check out in some of these situations, but our guys have been patient, and they're facing it. They're facing it like you face adversity, and that is one day at a time, and you control what you can control, and you move on every day.

At the end of the day, if you have that mentality and that, theme that you're marching to, you know what, there's satisfaction.

You can say that these guys are looking and there's a lot of uncertainty, and you know what, they're not playing that card. There is uncertainty. There is this, there is that. The thing is they're focused on controlling what they can control, and you know what, there's satisfaction at the end of the day because of that. That's a good life lesson. When you're getting stared into the face by something that could be significant.

Q. You do have Drake Ayala coming back after two years. Could you talk about what he learned --

TOM BRANDS: Drake Ayala is awesome. He's a leader. He's everything that you want lifestyle wise, so on, so forth. You say that a lot. Coaches want that a lot. I think that's why it's stated a lot.

Drake Ayala is the epitome of that. He doesn't want credit. He shies from it. I know that he knows that he has work to do, and he's humbly working.

He's coming off some adversity, as well, and he's as strong as ever.



I can tell you if I'm speaking for him that he's very excited about these opportunities, and he did spend a long year. He wrestled as a true freshman when Spencer Lee decided to get those corrective surgeries, and he stepped up for us. That's not something that we take lightly, those decisions, and he stepped up.

He fell short a little bit, then last year was a year in redshirt, and here we are now.

Q. You have several high-profile transfers. How are they fitting in?

TOM BRANDS: They're awesome. The portal obviously helped that transition. When I say transition, not transitioning them here, but the transition -- when you're looking at your roster and maybe what's thrown at you and how you're dealing with certain things, certainly the new portal rules, we had to utilize them. We jumped in that arena.

They're not just new additions. Two of them are All-Americans, and one of them was in the Round of 12. These are good wrestlers that we know because we looked at them when they were in high school. We looked at these guys. We know where they come from. We know where their strengths were as high school wrestlers. They were on our watch list. We recruited them.

So we're excited to have them all.

Q. Is there anyone that could have an immediate impact on the line-up?

TOM BRANDS: I stated earlier about opportunity for everybody on the roster, and that means everybody. Everybody on that roster has an opportunity now.

I don't know how much we're going to put -- how much emphasis we're going to put on a wrestle-off situation. This is something where the eyeball test is important. We've got a lot of upgrade in the depth of that roster.

Q. Regarding opportunities for a true freshman like Kueter, we don't know what's going to go on --

TOM BRANDS: You mentioned Kueter, and the best thing that Ben Kueter can do is focus on football. The only way that this is going to work is that he focuses on football until they're done with their bowl game, and when they're done with their bowl game, he comes over here and he focuses on wrestling here until we're done. He's done that, and it's not a yo-yo situation where it's in and out.

A lot of people want to know, well, how is he going to do

this. He's been doing it his whole life. I think Kirk Ferentz said it best when he said this isn't about like a toughness test whether or not Ben Kueter can do this. This isn't about that. This is about an opportunity that this guy has because he's put himself in that position.

Is he capable? Yeah. Can he do it? Hey, take care of football now. That's what I have maintained the entire time with this process.

Q. In that 197-pound class, it doesn't have that maybe standout guy in terms of the production. What have you seen in that room so far?

TOM BRANDS: 197? Yeah, we've got Zach Glazier and we've got Kolby Franklin. They've got opportunities. So, seize it.

Do you want a prediction? I'm not going to give you one.

Q. You talked about Real being one of your leaders coming back. Can you talk about him coming into the program just last year and stepping into like a leadership role?

TOM BRANDS: I think leadership is a lot of things, and one of them is when you're a dominant wrestler, at least domination minded, and you're winning at a high level, and the charisma that you have, I think that naturally helps you to pull people's attention to you, whether you're becoming a fan favorite, a household name, or a leader in a high-powered wrestling room.

It's not like a selfish type of, I want the limelight on me. I mean, he truly wants what's best for the team and for everybody around him, and that's why he's popular in that locker room.

He does march a little bit differently, and we love that. We love that.

But he's shared the spotlight, or I should say he came in and there was a guy like Spencer Lee that he was sharing the limelight with, and it works well. These guys aren't wired the way that they've got to have the attention or the spotlight on them. They just go out and do what they do best, and it's pretty doggone entertaining when they let it fly in a sport that sometimes can be a little slow and mundane if you're just trying to eke it out. But he's not trying to eke it out. He can score points very quickly, very explosively from all positions.

That's pretty good ingredients for being a fan favorite.

Q. How do you adjust to the rule changes?

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TOM BRANDS: Rule changes are dictated by rules committee. Our opinion doesn't matter. I've always looked at it that way. Just make sure that when you're on that committee that you're doing your job, and I think they did their job. I think they did their job at a high level because there's a lot of like changes. It wasn't just little changes that would confuse a spectator. Then people are going, like, what's that all about, it's like a three-point take-down. It makes sense to me. Let's do it.

So good. I love it. Let's get going. If you saw the video, that's how they've got to call it. It's not three, it's not three, it's three. You've got to turn your hand like this.

Q. One of those rule changes from last year was getting to use true freshmen in the lineup. How did you like that last year, and do you think you'll still utilize that this year?

TOM BRANDS: I don't know if I really liked it last year and learned to like it real quick. I think it's great. We will definitely use it. We have some freshmen -- you mentioned one of them, Gabe Arnold. There's some other freshmen that we will definitely be plugging into that rule. I think it's a great rule.

Q. Do you stop by the new wrestling room every day?

TOM BRANDS: Not every day. You know what, I'll tell you why, because it's in good hands. First of all, our administration delivered. Second of all, McComas-Lacina, I've said it over and over and over again, Justin Wainwright and those people there, they are lickety-split, but I was in there today, and every time I do go in there, there is a change, and there is progress, and those people are working their tail off. It's going to be spectacular.

That doesn't mean that there's going to be spectacular results, but you have good people we're going to put in, we're going to put good people in a good facility, and then we become great, and that's how it is. That's how it works. We love it. We love it. Credit a lot of people for that.

Q. What's the timeline on that?

TOM BRANDS: April. Moving in in April.

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