

University of Iowa Wrestling Media Conference

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Iowa City, Iowa, USA

Tom Brands

Men's Wrestling Press Conference

TOM BRANDS: It's great to be here. This is a little bit unusual just because we compete in two days, and we're fired up about that. What I mean about "unusual" is this press day is very close to competition.

Our schedule is a little bit different, having the competition early in a dual meet, a big dual meet, going to Oregon State.

We're excited.

I imagine you have questions, and I will answer them. How's that?

Q. Obviously transfers are common now in college athletics and obviously you have a lot of transfers. Could you give us a little background on the group that you brought in, and what was the key to really getting -- is it like recruiting what you may have when they were freshmen --

TOM BRANDS: There's two ways to get transfers. One is they go into the portal. You have a need for them and you recruit them. We did that with Parco. There's other ways when wrestlers want to leave the program that they're currently in, they have good academic standing, they make progress toward a degree. We cannot recruit them, and then they would choose to apply, accept admission if they're admitted, and they would go that route. Really anybody with good academic standing that meets all of the progress toward a degree can go anywhere at any time. The rules have gotten so liberal that way.

To answer your question, there's a lot of ways to transfer. There's a lot of ways to skin a cat. I'll tell you that if certain personnel fit our roster needs, we're open to it. I don't have an opinion on whether or not that's good or not, good for athletics or not. We love it. The more that want to be here, the merrier. We love it.

Q. What is the key for successful transfers, especially those who came from a program like Arizona State. Zeke Jones may be very different from Tom Brands.



How does that work out?

TOM BRANDS: Zeke Jones is a worthy opponent. I've got enough problems running my own program to try to evaluate what's going on in his program.

Q. But for them to adapt to you is what I'm saying as opposed to --

TOM BRANDS: That's not my concern. My concern is the more the merrier. If you want to be a Hawkeye, be a Hawkeye. If you don't, then you don't have to be. Nobody is twisting your arm to stay here, and nobody is twisting your arm to come here.

Now, recruiting is competitive, so maybe we'll work a little harder on some of our better, bigger needs. We just had a recruiting weekend last weekend. We had a whole bunch of juniors in, a whole bunch of high-powered juniors in, and we have to do a good job. We have to do a good job in the portal, and we have to do a good job recruiting uncommitted, unsigned seniors in high school. So you're recruiting juniors in high school, you're recruiting seniors in high school still maybe. You're going to look at the portal. You don't have a crystal ball. You don't know what the portal is going to look like, but you're going to look at the portal. That's going to be interesting the week or day or whatever after the conference qualifier or the NCAA Tournament or whatever that timeline is. That's always interesting.

We're going to have a presence. We're going to do what the rules say we can do, and we love it.

Q. Ben Kueter announced this summer he's wrestling full-time. What can you expect from him?

TOM BRANDS: First of all, you've seen his progress. Through the trials process in early June, making that U-20 team, and then into the U-20 worlds as a heavyweight in the beginning of September. So July, August, September, that's three months. Three months solely dedicated to wrestling, and we love that progress.

The biggest thing with Ben Kueter is he is a conscientious guy. I think that's a good trait. Especially when you're young, you want to make sure that your I's are dotted and your T's are crossed, meaning good enough just isn't going

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to cut it. He looks for feedback. He asks for feedback. He's mature in that regard, meaning thick skin to the point where if he's not asking and he's getting feedback, he'll take it. He's a curious fellow, very curious. We love him.

Q. What have Parco, Teemer and Buchanan added to your room?

TOM BRANDS: They want to be here. There's energy. They all three have a different approach. But the similarities are, just like -- we haven't even talked about Drake Ayala. Drake Ayala is the runner-up returning in this program moving up a weight and he's the bedrock. So we're excited about that.

You asked about Ben Kueter, but we have another runner-up coming in as a transfer with Teemer. But the thing that those guys have, that super competitive wrestlers or athletes have, is they want to win.

The good thing about the transfer portal is if things get stale where you're at, you can leave, and nobody can keep you out. Whether or not things were stale where they were or for whatever reason, we're the benefactor of their decision to want to be an Iowa Hawkeye.

Q. How would you describe the vibe in the room and the culture with so much new around the program?

TOM BRANDS: Vibe and culture in the room is something that you'll have to come and see for yourself. I'm not going to sit here and tell you that we have great culture in our room. You figure that out for yourself.

You know what; we love that when a guy makes a decision whether he's staying at the same weight or going up a weight he makes that decision with conviction. We love that you can maybe move up into some uncharted territory and still be a dominant wrestler.

Drake Ayala has that opportunity. I mean, I'm not a guy that makes predictions. You all know that in here. I say that all the time. If I was making predictions, I don't think the weight class is going to bother him moving up.

Anytime that happens, it's attitude more than anything, and I have some mentors of my own, Royce Alger, who moved up, and he did it for the good of the team. He didn't move up because he was bigger. He went from 167 to 177 his senior year and he made a statement and was a two-time national champ at two different weights.

So you do things for different reasons, and when you do things with conviction, it doesn't really matter that we don't have anybody returning at the same weight class that they

performed at. That could be a really good thing, also.

Q. 174 to 184, where do those two weight classes stand today and do you expect that to change entering the season?

TOM BRANDS: We love Patrick Kennedy who just got back from Albania. We love Nelson Brands. We love Gabe Arnold. We love -- who else aren't they talking about? Who aren't they talking about? We love Angelo Ferrari. He's an 84-pounder. We love all four of those guys, and there's nothing wrong with sorting things out amongst friends. How's that? We love the competition.

Q. What have you liked about Angelo Ferrari so far since he's been here?

TOM BRANDS: I mean, things that you could guess that all super talented and driven young athletes, the characteristics that they have and possess, and he's probably got them to a little bit better degree.

Q. What is Ryder Block bringing in his second year with the program?

TOM BRANDS: He had a lot of time off, and he's determined. He skewed curves in his healing process. Our medical team is top-notch. He's a beneficiary of that, and we're excited to see him on the mat.

We also have Cullan Schriever there. We're pretty deep at 41. Jace Rhodes is there, Ybarra. Jesse Ybarra is there. He's up a weight, he could probably go 33, 41, and sometimes you never know -- you don't have a crystal ball, so you never know, you could be surprised with what happens. But Ryder Block, love his approach every day, love his approach through his strengthening and rehabbing or whatever you want to call it.

We're ready to go. We're going to Oregon State. We leave tomorrow. It will be his first competition in a Hawkeye singlet even though freshmen can wrestle in Hawkeye singlets, but he had that issue. So he's excited, we're excited, the fans are excited. Hey, take advantage of your opportunity now, stud. Don't look back. Don't make this a quarterback controversy.

Q. You've got two four-time Montana State champions on your roster in Leif and Keyan. What can Leif do to help Keyan step up from a smaller less populous state like Montana?

TOM BRANDS: It's a long way from home, and Leif Schroeder is an incredible leader in our program. ISAAC, things where he's paying attention to the landscape in what

student-athletes are going for. He's a voice. He's a voice for our team. He's been a voice. He's been a great leader. He's doing his student teaching right now. He's going to be a great educator and mentor, and he's doing that with Keyan.

Keyan Hernandez has a sister in her program, as well. She just graduated last year. She's a manager for us, has been, and she's still around working for the Hawkeye wrestling club a little bit doing a lot for us still. We love her. We love the family. We love Keyan that he's here. We just love everything.

You ask about culture, holy mackerel, I've sat up here and talked about how much I love it. So it must be pretty good.

Q. What have you seen from your 125 pounders this off season?

TOM BRANDS: We have seen that two are probably emerging, Cruz and Petersen. That's not a surprise. Petersen had a procedure and he's come out well with that. He's 10 months post. We love his fire. We love his drive. We love his approach. I don't know if he's quite ready right now, but 10 minutes from now he could be ready. We love them both. It will be competitive, and I think we listed both of them on the Oregon State thing, but more than likely it'll be Cruz out of the gate right away. Then we'll see. We'll go from there with Stanford. Then we'll go from there on the next one, then from there on the next one.

Q. Nelson Brands has gone through a lot here. As both his coach and his uncle, what have you seen from him that's made him able to continue?

TOM BRANDS: I see a guy that weathered a storm. I see a guy that could have complained and took something and didn't really complain and actually used his awesome humor and his personality and actually made it work in his favor. I don't know how you do that, but he did it. Good for him. That was a bad, bad deal. We're not going to get back into that, but I love his resolve and his perseverance. It's not something where you just snap your fingers and you wake up one day and say this isn't going to bother me, I'm going to do it. It bothered him. It's something that you have to deal with when things come down the path that way, and he among others on our roster handled it very well.

So hey, we're glad. We're glad that he's eligible on our team. His leadership, his presence in the locker room, his popularity with his teammates. He's a pretty popular guy and was raised quite well by his mother, my sister-in-law. How's that?

Q. What are you looking for most just generally out of Saturday?

TOM BRANDS: We're looking to do what motivated wrestlers love to do, and that's go out and take care of business at every weight class. It doesn't mean it's going to be that easy. It's an opportunity. It's the first opportunity. Even Steven. You don't get up, gallop faster because it's your first one. We've got to be even Steven steady, but why not kick everybody's butt the whole way through the season, and that's what we're looking for.

We're going to put 10 guys on the mat and we're going to evaluate when we're done and then we're going to come back, and a week from Saturday we've got Stanford and then we've got Bellarmine and then we've got Iowa State coming to town and then we go to St. Louis for a two dual thing and then we've got a little bit of a break, then we go to the Soldier Salute, and then our Big Ten dual meet schedule stuff, and then we end with Oklahoma State home. We've got Ohio State at home. I mentioned Iowa State is at home. That's a decent home schedule.

Then the Big Tens are at Northwestern and the national championships are in Philadelphia. It'll be like that (snaps fingers).

Q. Talk about a winning mindset at the beginning of the season, Ben Kueter is used to winning everything, especially on the mat. What have you learned from him in the past nine, 10 months after a couple of losses that he took that may not have been a familiar experience for him?

TOM BRANDS: I learned what I described earlier, that he's conscientious. He seeks feedback. If he gets feedback that isn't, like, a glowing report, he'll eat it and take it and absorb it, and he will use it, and it will make him better. He has thick skin that way.

If you want to use some humor, he's scared to death of his mother. She's a pretty tough woman.

We love the fact that he is full-time wrestling, and we'll see where this goes after this. This isn't something where we're sitting here hoping that we hang on to this through next year, whatever. Hey, the decision was made. All parties were part of the decision-making process. After the season, we'll evaluate and we'll go from there.

But I certainly absolutely love that he is full-time wrestling since May, June last spring. Love it.

Q. Today the university announced you guys have sold out season tickets. What do you want to show



the fans this year?

TOM BRANDS: Iowa Hawkeye wrestling is strong. We have to do a better job performing. I think if you put exciting teams on the mat, they will be heralded and showered with affection by the fan base. Since we sold out the arena again with season ticket sales, you know what, we tell our guys kind of a funny way, when you're wrestling and it's your turn to step on the mat, don't have that the time that everybody gets out of their seat and goes and gets an ice cream cone. Have that the one where they nail themselves to the seat because they don't want to miss one second of your performance.

If we can get 10 weight classes with those types of competitors, we're going to be where we need to be.

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