

2023 NCAA Wrestling Championship

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T-Mobile Center

Caleb Henson

Semifinals Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: We have with us now Caleb Henson from the 149-pound Championship final. Caleb is from Virginia Tech. Some comments about your semifinal bout?

CALEB HENSON: In the semis it was cool to wrestle Rich. We wrestled back in Vegas and it was a good match. I got a lot of respect for him. He's a worthy opponent and clearly had success in other places but he made me better this year pushing me to push myself. The match itself was a hard-fought battle. It was seven minutes of war and I knew that going into it and just staying focused through that whole seven minutes and wrestling and hustling all the little small positions and ultimately staying focused, like I was saying, and got the job done.

Q. Your coach, Tony Robie, has called you one of the most mentally tough human beings he's ever met. How did you build that mental toughness?

CALEB HENSON: I think it came from my family and just being installed to it at a young age and putting your full heart into it and just not quitting on yourself. I got a little brother so I'm never going to show any quit because that's the day he says he wins. So that helps. But just being grateful for the opportunity and giving it my all and competing with my full heart and I think that's where the mental aspect comes from, just staying true to myself, like I said, coming from a young age -- sorry. I'm getting distracted. My teammate is wrestling. Yeah, just doing everything every day to your full extent and all the little things add up.

Q. You're from the state of Georgia, correct?

CALEB HENSON: Yes, sir.

Q. Talk to me about the impact this will have on your state's wrestlers, kids that come out of that state. If you win; excuse me.

CALEB HENSON: When I win. I think it will just show that



anything is possible. From the state of Georgia, I feel like the past two years -- I keep repeating myself, but we used to be slept on, but now I feel like we've got a little more eyes from all ages and just to show that it can be done. Like, get the state -- or the north mentality out of your head and just -- it's about what you do and the work you put in and, yeah, I hope I can be a role model and show them that anything is possible with hard work.

Q. Caleb, I don't think we talked since after state a couple years ago. Just wanted to say you are the first Georgia state finalists since 1983. Just wanted to talk about that. I think Charlie Heard was the last one, Three-time All-American, Olympic alternate, I believe, but just an amazing accomplishment for you. So I wanted to see how you're feeling about that. You're doing a great job for the state of Georgia. Super proud of you. Awesome what you're doing.

CALEB HENSON: Thank you. Yeah, I didn't know it's been that long and that's kind of the thing I was answering earlier is getting that mentality of Georgia this, Georgia that. Caleb Henson is in the finals. And I love to rep Georgia. Again, it's cool to be from a southern state, but I don't think of it like that. I think of it that it's cool because of all the hard work I've put in. And it's fascinating, I guess, 1983, you said? It's pretty cool and hopefully I can be the first champ. Racing with my boy Jackson Smith, we have been talking about it for years, and sadly he didn't accomplish his goals but hopefully I can win that competition tomorrow.

Q. I know Jackson will bounce back strongly. How does it feel to be with a high school teammate to compete in the National Tournament two years in a row now? You don't see that often in Georgia, probably Sean Russell and Ryan Millhof, the last two to compete, awesome representation and proud of how you're competing.

CALEB HENSON: Thank you. Competing with Jackson is dope. We have stayed pretty close and that's my boy and got a lot of other boys that will be here eventually and we'll have a lot of Georgia names competing in this tournament soon.



Q. You've had a grind of a season. You've been ultra dynamic scoring a lot of points. In this match it only took one point to get it done. How did you stay focused up against against a guy that you knew you were going to need to score plenty of point against because he was going to keep coming?

CALEB HENSON: It's weird for me because I consider myself offensive. And a guy like that who is very savvy defensively, you have to reconstruct your game plan a little bit and stay mentally tough and make it harder on him and not wrestle the positions that he is excellent at.

Yeah, just staying focused, allowing him to make the mistakes and 1-0 is a weird match for me. I don't feel that a lot, I don't see that a lot. There was a lot of action, I felt like, which got me engaged. I can't just stand there and front. As long as we're exchanging blows I can stay focused and it's not for anyone to game plan at me out there, I'm going to come at you, but, again, from my hard work putting in. I know I can stay focused. It's seven minutes. I do extra workouts for seven minutes for that reason. For that period I am absolutely locked and dialed and I can say that's from my training.

Q. In the ACC Finals, you took a loss.

CALEB HENSON: Yep.

Q. It wasn't really because you feel like you gave up a takedown. It was very controversial. How did you bounce back from that and make sure that you essentially kept the referee out of one of your matches this weekend?

CALEB HENSON: Yeah, at the end of the day, I've already -- like, win or losses don't affect my life to an extreme standard. I want to win every single match, but just being blessed and realizing how cool it is to compete, what God allows me to do, it's allowed me to have victory with myself every day. So that loss was just -- it sucked in that moment, but getting on the bus with my boys, going back to my house in Blacksburg, getting back on the mat the next day and realized how grateful I am to just compete and take that as a learning lesson and made myself better from it. Just more effort in small positions and don't ever take anything for granted.

Q. Caleb, your pressure usually breaks a lot of kids in a lot of matches. Do you feel like that's your strength and that's what drives you in most of your matches, just late in the end a lot of them tend to break down most of the time. Do you think that is what carries you for a lot of the time or how do you feel about that?

CALEB HENSON: Yeah. I think a wrestling match isn't decided in the first two minutes, it's seven minutes of war and I'm going to stay locked in for that seven. Whatever happens, happens, and I'm just as good in the first minute as I am in the last ten seconds. It's just something that is part of my training and my mindset is that I'm not going to fade and if anything, I get better as the match goes on. But, yeah, it's a good asset to have and it's something I work hard for. It's not all, but it's a lot of my wrestling.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

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