

2023 NCAA Wrestling Championship

Friday, March 22, 2024

Kansas City, Missouri, USA

T-Mobile Center

Levi Haines

Semifinals Media Conference



THE MODERATOR: We have with us from the 157-pound Championship Final, Levi Haines from Penn State. Levi?

LEVI HAINES: I wrestled a tough competitor and just a fun battle. Obviously I have some history with him from last year. So it was kinda cool to get the opportunity to wrestle each other again.

Q. Levi, because of last year, you shot early, he sort of put the overhooks on you, sort of bailed. You were a little careful at the beginning and then, you know, can you explain at the end what happened for the fall?

LEVI HAINES: Yeah, really in the beginning there was situational what I was feeling. It wasn't like a game plan before. Obviously we knew that guy is dangerous there, got some good stuff in that upper body position.

So he was just pulling me up, it was something I felt in the match. So tactically, I felt it was a good move at that point and the guy was fresh. So, yeah, it was just something I felt in that position. I don't know how to describe it any other way.

But it definitely gave me confidence late in the match that I could get to his legs when I wanted to.

Q. You have obviously been in this position last year. What have you taken from that experience that has helped you keep a calmer head or at least know what to expect when you are in that position on the mat in this atmosphere?

LEVI HAINES: Just resorting back to my practice habits. Kind of what I fall back on in those times. I wrestle a lot of tough competitors in the room and our coaches put us in those situations. So being comfortable being uncomfortable there and obviously competing in front of crowds like this before. Obviously, at Penn State we wrestle in front of a lot of people so I feel blessed to be able to come and do the same thing here.

Q. I'm curious how excited are you to be in the finals and wrestling Jacori Teemer?

LEVI HAINES: I'm super excited. Never got to wrestle Jacori Teemer before, so I look forward to it. He's a tough competitor and doesn't matter if it's the National Finals or if we were wrestling at some random location on some random day. I just really love to compete and I'm excited to be able to do that tomorrow.

Q. How much have you changed from last year when you came in? What were your memories going to the tournament? Were you a redshirt freshman or true freshman last year?

LEVI HAINES: I was a true freshman last year and coming to this tournament, I was focused on the things that I could control really, and I just wanted to go compete hard and use the gifts God has given me to compete hard, and whatever that got me resultwise I could be content with. I know I have great coaches that I could go back and work on things and improve, but, yeah, my goal coming in this weekend was just going out and competing free, scoring lots of points and, yeah.

Q. Levi, when you look back on last year and how it played out, what was the hardest part physically or mentally of getting back here to have another shot?

LEVI HAINES: Yeah, it's -- it's been tough for sure. It's just a little bit different. I feel like from last year to this year, mainly because I was kind of putting a little bit of an expectation on myself at the beginning of the year and I was kind of struggling with some of the pressures and things. I felt like there was this unspoken expectation of myself. So I battled through that earlier in the year, and I've just been working through that with my faith. And so, yeah, I feel that was kind of the main difference from last year to this year.

Wrestling is wrestling at the end of the day. Not much has changed there. Obviously I've made some improvements with techniques and things, but really I feel like that mental battle was kind of the biggest thing for me.

Q. Before your semifinal match, Tyler Kasak was able to punch through to the final round how cool was that for you? You guys have had a bond, friendship and sort of the same trajectory.

LEVI HAINES: Tyler doing that was awesome. I was pumped for him. I've known Tyler for a long time. We've spent a lot of time on teams, competing, and he's like a little brother to me. Means a lot to me to see one of who I consider to be my brothers achieve a life-long goal. Obviously he wants to be a national champion, and he came up short, but he's coming back through, and I'm proud of him for that. That's a tough position to be in and shows toughness on his part wrestling back so very proud of him.

Q. Obviously Penn State tradition is very rich. You have national champions, Olympic champions that you are surrounded by. You said you put a lot of pressure on yourself. Does being in that atmosphere make it harder or easier for you?

LEVI HAINES: I don't know if the atmosphere makes a difference. I think we're extremely blessed to have those guys because they have dealt with the similar pressures that I do. If somebody tells you they don't feel pressure, they're probably lying to you. I don't know what competitor that doesn't feel that kind of pressure.

So having those guys to use as a resource has been amazing. Guys that have exceed at the absolute highest levels that wrestling has to offer. So getting their insight on things is huge and I think it's really important to use those guys.

Q. Why did you put that pressure on yourself? Was it the media or how you performed last year?

LEVI HAINES: You know, I wish I 100% knew because then that would help me solve it a lot easier. I think a lot of it was I kinda put an expectation on myself more than anything. I was thinking, hey, I'm kind of what people are saying to be the guy now, and I need to go prove that, and I realized that that didn't matter.

It was more important that I just go out and compete, use the gifts God had given me. I don't think there was like a specific thing that kind of put that pressure on me, if anything I would say I put it on myself.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

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