

2025 NCAA Wrestling Championship

Saturday, March 22, 2025
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA
Wells Fargo Center

Lucas Byrd

Finals Media Conference

133 pounds

Lucas Byrd (Illinois) d. Drake Ayala (Iowa), 3-2 (OT)

LUCAS BYRD: Same as after I won my semis. I've just got to remember where my toes are at.

Q. This match, it's different than other ones you've had with him. When it got really to where it was tied at the end, it looked like you felt like you had the edge and you kept doing what you needed to do rather than wrestle his match. Talk a little bit about how you established that.

LUCAS BYRD: Like, obviously, a lot of people saw that match. Every time there's a break, every time was a challenge break. I looked at my corner -- Jeremy Hunter, Mike Poeta, Austin O'Connor, Christian Kanzler, hell, our trainer Jeff Jahnel -- but me and Jeremy have been striking on a different level.

We can probably speak telepathically. We know what's going on. Anything he tells me, I just have to trust him. And I get a little run down in that overtime, that they threw the brick, looked to Jeremy. Hey, we're good. Jeremy is calmed down. Said, we're going to go neutral. Is that what we're going to do? We're going to go neutral?

It's funny I stepped on the line, chose neutral. Look over, see my brother in the front row. He says, go down! Go down! I shake my head. And I trust my coaches so damn much with everything.

Q. Let's go through your career. Fifth, fifth, lose it early in a couple of rounds of 12, don't place, redshirt. Now you're an NCAA champion. Reflect on that and how you got to this point.

A. It's been one hell of a journey. It's been one of the most exciting journeys I've ever been on and it is a moment, winning that match, hugging Jeremy. I need to give Mike a hug. I need to give all the coaching staff a hug, because



I've been a pain in the ass over these six years. But they're my people. They're my home.

Q. Talk about the legacy at Illinois. Obviously they have had a lot of champions over the years, but each one adds to that. And you are bringing another layer of history to that program that has been producing for a long time.

LUCAS BYRD: Hey, man, it's a cycle you want to be involved in. There's a lot of good stuff going on at Illinois. We didn't have the best blood round this year. We had a lot of guys that should have won matches. Ball didn't bounce our way. It goes to show that we all have fight.

Go back, look at Big Tens, look at the second round. Danny O'Brien taking out Carson Kharchla, Edmond beating Allred, Zac beating Salazar, Kannon beating D'Emilio. Those guys are fighters. In wrestling we all come back to it because it's the one thing. It takes a lot and it barely gives but when it gives it's a damn good feeling.

Q. Flashback, six years ago you decommitted from Maryland. It was really late in the recruiting process. What led you to Illinois? And walk us through kind of how things have changed between then and now? Obviously the coaching staff has changed and you've come a long way.

LUCAS BYRD: You know, it really didn't strike me until earlier today, actually. Me and Mike were waiting in line. He goes, you know, you and Jeremy -- me and Jeremy have become like this. I could call Jeremy at 2:00 in the morning and he would show to work out with me if I asked him to. Jeremy full heartedly has my trust in everything.

Like my freshman year, I was the young guy. I was a pain. Not that they didn't help me or didn't deal with me, but I was always that kid. I want to learn. I want to get so good at wrestling.

And to be able to sit here and I haven't even processed what has happened yet. And I just want to celebrate with my teammates. I want to celebrate with my coaches



because -- I want to celebrate with my girlfriend, my family.

Like my dad doesn't cry, and he cried. Like, that's a big deal. It's just a feeling I will never forget.

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