

2025 NCAA Wrestling Championship

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

Wyatt Hendrickson

Finals Media Conference



Wyatt Hendrickson (Oklahoma State) d. Gable Steveson (Minnesota), 5-4

WYATT HENDRICKSON: I think it's going to be a couple more days before the emotions settle down. But first, I just want to thank my family. I want to thank my lord and savior Jesus Christ for blessing me.

In that last shot I was in on that leg and there was a little extra push behind me to get that takedown. I don't think that was by chance.

At the beginning of the week, Brandon Mason, our doctor, we went to Life Church and he was, like, hey, guys great sermon. I was listening to the sermon. He was talking about David and Goliath. And David had a vision of victory before he stepped on the mat.

I kind of carried that with me all week. Even though he went after Goliath and everyone was, like, this can't be done, he had a mind of a champion, he had a vision of victory. Leading up to this tournament I knew that my head had to be in the right place if I wanted to end up on top.

Going out there, I was courageous. And my strength is -- it worked out. I wrestled that match. I was patient. I went in with the right mindset. And off the bat I was, like, this isn't going to be an easy match.

Right off the beginning it was scrambles on the out. I didn't want to concede any points. That was the mindset I had to have was to act like I wanted to be a champion and wrestle like I wanted to be a champion.

He took me down once. But I took him down when it mattered.

Q. What were those 15 or so seconds like when you had to ride him out?

WYATT HENDRICKSON: My arms have never felt so strong. All I know is I kind of felt like when I got that

takedown he gave that second to relax and I took advantage of that.

I don't know if I had a claw and a (indiscernible), but I was just, like, I was looking at the clock and I'm, like, I'm squeezing him. I made up my mind. I was, if he did stand up, I didn't want to lock my hands. I don't want to get a locked hands call. But I was squeezing. And I was, if he stands up, I'm just going to lock and pick him up and just hold him in the air for the last couple seconds because I'm, like, I have made it this far. And I knew I was going to win this match.

I don't care if I had to rip my arms off squeezing him. I was, like, I'm holding this man down and winning this match.

Q. How much did your time at Air Force lead into this and when will you start your service with the Air Force after this time in Oklahoma State?

WYATT HENDRICKSON: Absolutely I mean the last couple of years you see me wrestle. And I think the Air Force Academy, Coach Barber, Coach Joe Johnston, Coach Heilman, Coach Scottie Boykin, all those guys helped build my foundation along with my coaches when I was a kid, Coach Matt (indiscernible) and my father, Todd Hendrickson.

And to answer the last question, I'm serving right now in the WCAP, the World Class Athlete Program. I'm honored that they let me use this year of eligibility on my journey to being a 2020 Olympic champion.

It's a one-for-one, though, so for every year I'm in WCAP I'll incur an additional year of service to make sure I'm still getting those 5 years of operational service, giving back to you guys and serving this great country. Obviously I'm representing the Air Force for right now. But I'm going to continue my wrestling career for the next three years.

Q. When did the idea for the American flag come and what did it mean to have that both at the beginning and at the end?



WYATT HENDRICKSON: From the very beginning, I think it's more than wrestling. And I think trying to portray that and give the image of that is important.

And wrestling, we're so honored that we live in a free country and we can come gather in these events and do what we love and be able to receive the support while we're wrestling on that mat.

I just like to bring that energy into the arena that -- we're all on one team at the at the end of the day. Obviously we're going head to head in here. Iron sharpens at the end of the day. When we go to the Olympics, whatever we need to do, we're all one team in the end.

Q. You spoke the other day about Los Angeles and said you don't care who you wrestle. You have a goal to be an Olympic champion. To be an Olympic champion you probably have to beat some Olympic champions. You did that today. Just talk about the mindset where you can put yourself in a position to beat this Olympic champion and many others maybe ahead of you, right?

WYATT HENDRICKSON: I think it's just -- you never rise to the level of your expectations. You fall to the level of your training. I've been asked earlier in the season when I was wrestling a minute or two because I was getting some pins, they were, like, are you worried if you have to wrestle a full match.

And I said, absolutely not because in my training room I'm training as if it's going to be a war out there, a seven-minute match every single time. I think when I go out there, even if I'm not in my best day.

Today I wrestled pretty freakin' good today. But even on some of those days it's just having that confidence and attitude when you go out there, that mentality you want to be a champion. You could see that from the get-go. I wasn't out there to concede points. I was out there to get points and I did.

Q. You won a U-23 World championship, you got injured. Then you got teched in the All-Star Classic. How did you make the adjustments from that point going forward to get to this moment where you're knocking off an Olympic gold medalist?

WYATT HENDRICKSON: I think it's really important to obviously look at what you did good but look at what you did bad. I think I've always been a great wrestler. But I really think the biggest thing that changed was my mentality, to be honest with you.

If you go back to that match I just wrestled, if I wasn't going out there, if I was just wrestling not to lose versus wrestling to win, maybe in those scrambles I would concede a little bit early. But my mindset and my attitude now is kind of developed you just gotta believe in yourself.

In times like this, when there's 18,000 people trying to watch you wrestle, you are going up against an Olympic champion, a two-time national champion, even the semifinals, the national champion, it's just important to -- the match is won before you step out on the mat.

He who thinks he can and he thinks he can't, they're both usually right.

I said this yesterday, and Coach Taylor, he told us the person that wins the national championship doesn't matter who you are it's the person who wins five matches. I truly believe I'm going to win every single match of this tournament. I took it match by match, period by period and second by second. Those last 15 seconds mattered. Made it happen.

Q. Can you talk about going from the Air Force Academy to an extremely tradition rich school like Oklahoma State, having that contingent of fan support, and then obviously I'm sure you felt obviously the arena's support and just the energy and momentum behind you going against Steveson as a two-time champ? Could you talk about balancing that and then the nerves of being on the NCAA championship-raised mat?

WYATT HENDRICKSON: I think it's awesome to have such a big fan base. I'm really honored to be able to represent the United States Air Force and all the people that I've met and have supported of me from day one. They're still supporting me now.

Obviously the fan base grew. I went to Stillwater and met a lot of awesome new fans and created even more of a wrestling environment. More at the time I would say wrestling and going out on the streets -- it's a wrestling town.

You go everywhere and they're, like, you go to Walmart, you go anywhere, a gas station, they're, oh, great match last week.

Colorado Springs is not much of a wrestling town, but on base, on campus seeing all the guys, having their support, a lot of them showed up today and they were there to celebrate me.

I think it's just as much -- the Air Force's national

championship was Oklahoma State's, because if I didn't go to the Air Force Academy and get that foundation built, I wouldn't be standing right here telling you I'm a national champion.

Q. You talked about the importance of mentality. You're in the room now where you're coached by an Olympic and world champion. You have an assistant who is a world champion. How big are they in terms of the confidence and the mindset and knowing what it takes to get it done at that level?

WYATT HENDRICKSON: I think it's having a high level of trust. When they tell me something, you know, sometimes you feel a different way; it's better to just shut up, they probably know what they're talking about.

In some of those situations where I'm out there, the jitters are going, Coach Taylor looks at me and says, hey, relax; you've trained for this, you're ready and prepared and you're the man. I just trust them.

He's been telling me the same things from -- the week after he called me and asked me to be a Cowboy, before I even started training in Stillwater, he would send me these texts, saying "Wyatt Hendrickson, national champion. Wyatt Hendrickson national champion. Wyatt Hendrickson, 2025 national champion," doing that all season. Just those little things, putting in my head, been consistent and believed in me as well as everyone else on the training staff.

When I'm in there, when we're training, it's really just -- everything that Coach Taylor and the guys tell me to do, I was willing to do it because I want to be a national champion. I wanted to do whatever it took, no matter how many hours, no matter how many extra practices, no matter what it took.

Q. When you first walked out, Gable Steveson walked up to you. Could you talk about that? And how much did it mean having the President of the United States sitting at mat side add to the experience?

WYATT HENDRICKSON: That's my Commander-in-Chief right there, baby. I was really excited to have him here.

But going out there, I was pretty focused. I noticed when I was walking up on the mat, he was walking over to me to say something. He talked about -- he was an Olympic champion. He walked around with that flag around his shoulders. I just took it as respect. He's obviously been an Olympic champion. I was going up against an Olympic champion. I wasn't doing that in any way, shape or form to mock him. I'm proud of my service, what I've done and I'll continue do. That's the reason I wore the flag, I already

explained, one nation under God at the end of the day.

Q. You transferred from Air Force to Oklahoma State. Were there any other schools you considered?

WYATT HENDRICKSON: Yes, there were a couple different schools I considered. I knew there was a short window to choose what teams.

I did actually look at going to Minnesota. They did mention Gable might be coming back. When I was looking at colleges, I was looking at what was the best fit for me and my future. I always knew there was a chance that Gable could maybe come back. I welcomed that challenge. I wasn't willing to back down from any battle.

I also looked at Michigan. But Coach Taylor was one of my biggest role models when I was a kid. I remember watching him in the national finals in the basement with my dad. Whenever I got that call, it was pretty unreal. It was a really special time because there's so many great schools. I was, like, I don't know where to go. God give me a sign. Within 24 hours I'm getting a call from David Taylor. I'm like, whoa, okay.

I wrestled with Coach Taylor. At the beginning of the season he would usually get a couple takedowns on me but towards the end of the season I got a couple pounds, he didn't like wrestling me anymore. That was sweet. Konner Doucet and Luke Surber, they helped train me to be a national champion.

Q. Along those lines, how would you describe the program that Coach Taylor is building, and where do you see it going forward?

WYATT HENDRICKSON: I think it's important to not show up and try to strip everything out of the program and rebuild it. He really did a good job at, see what's going well, see what can be improved. I think we're taking it one step at a time. Rome wasn't built in a day.

This is his first year back. We did place in the top three, but we have higher goals looking forward. I know the next group of guys we're going to be bringing in, they will be absolute hammers. If they want to be a national champion, they're going to have all the tools at Oklahoma State they will need to be a national champion.

Q. I'm retired Air Force, super excited to see you win this.

WYATT HENDRICKSON: Thank you for your service.

Q. What is your AFC? And are you considering 20



years like once you get to that stage?

WYATT HENDRICKSON: Absolutely. I'm an acquisitions officer. Doesn't sound super fancy. A little bit of the finance stuff. I get to buy new stuff for the Air Force, buy some planes.

Right now I'm in the WCAP program. It's a one-for-one. I plan on doing this three more years. I'll still have the five-year commitment of being an acquisitions officer.

From the very beginning I knew I wanted to make the military my career, which was obviously I chose the Air Force Academy, I was looking at more than wrestling, I was looking at my career goals, life goals.

I could accomplish all those at the Air Force Academy. Wrestle in the Big 12. Get a world-class education, being part of something bigger than myself.

I'll wrestle for three more and then I'll do my -- I plan on staying for 20. Yes, I'm planning on making a career out of it. As soon as I am done wrestling, doing my required, but it will be about nine years. I plan on, if it's not broken, it doesn't need to be fixed.

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