

2026 NCAA Wrestling Championship

Friday, March 20, 2026

Cleveland, Ohio, USA

Rocket Arena

Ohio State

Jesse Mendez

Semifinals Media Conference



Jesse Mendez (Ohio State) d. Luke Stanich (Lehigh), 4-1

THE MODERATOR: Welcome to the 2026 NCAA Division I wrestling championships press conference. Tonight we have Jesse Mendez from Ohio State.

Jesse, I was wondering if you can reflect on the past couple days, the match tonight, and competing tomorrow for a championship.

JESSE MENDEZ: This is the most exciting tournament in the world. There's not a better atmosphere when you've got this many wrestling fans in the building.

My semifinal match, I didn't score as much as I wanted to. He slowed me down with a collar tie in the overtime. Going to the overtime, I knew how to get one. Got to my underhook, and it was full set from there.

Q. What part of your journey have you enjoyed the most?

JESSE MENDEZ: I think just spending it with my team and my coaches. I really do love this team. I think the culture we have, it's amazing. When you have a group of guys like this, it's fun to go in the room and go to war.

This sport is grueling, but when you have a team full of guys that you really enjoy being around and love, it makes it that much easier. Just cherishing my last year. It really takes a village to do what I do. I get the glory of it in the seven minutes, but there's so many people that deserve that glory.

Q. When you look at your career, your college career as a whole, what are you most proud of? Whether that be a win or something else, not even in wrestling?

JESSE MENDEZ: I would just say the way I compete, the way I carry myself. Win or lose, I always try to be

respectful. I try to wrestle a style that's exciting for the fans. I don't want to have a snoozefest out there. I try to wrestle an exciting style and hold myself with respect.

Q. After this tournament's over, what's the first real meal you're going to have?

JESSE MENDEZ: Oh, man, probably just like a burger or something, like keep it simple.

Q. Where would you go?

JESSE MENDEZ: Nothing fast food. Probably a place by my house, like Yogi's. It's like a little bar right next to my apartment.

Q. You are not overlooking your next match against Sergio, but the Hodge Trophy conversation is heating up. Big conversation up in State College is between you and Mitchell Mesenbrink. What do you want Penn State fans to know about you both as a wrestler and a candidate in that race?

JESSE MENDEZ: I try not to think about the Hodge too much. At the end of the day, I just want to score bonus points. If you get the Hodge at the end of the day, that's a cherry on top of it.

I think we're a lot more alike than people think. We both have a really deep love for the sport, and we're both students of the game. We both probably really enjoy learning and finding the little nuances of this sport and finding ways to apply it to our style and take little things from maybe it's a competitor or somebody we looked up to. Taking stuff from their game and trying to figure out how to put it into our style.

I think honestly we're probably not that much different than people would think. Whoever gets it at the end of the day, that's kudos to them.

Q. Right before you, one of your main drill partners, Ben Davino, won his. How gratifying is it to see the work you put in all season long and now both of you wrestling for titles tomorrow?



JESSE MENDEZ: I could speak about Davino all day. That kid, he's the best. When you're fortunate to have a guy on your team like Ben Davino who's so passionate about what he does. He's a student of the game, and not only that, he's just a great kid. He loves what he does.

Getting to do it by his side and see the way he's grown over the last two years to now seeing him in the national finals, it just doesn't surprise me.

Q. Of all the times you've gone together, have you talked about this (no microphone)?

JESSE MENDEZ: We talked about this ever since he got on campus. This was the goal, back to back. This was exactly how we drew it up. Both in the finals, and we're going to do it back to back.

Q. Just wondering, looking at your match with Stanich, going back to that, he's a U-20 world champ, you're a U-20 world medalist, both competitors. What do you like about getting in a fight like that, a match like that, especially going against Vega. You haven't been in tight matches like that all year. Getting pushed like that, what does it do for you?

JESSE MENDEZ: It's really good for me. I get battle tested in the room, so to get it to transpire in a match like that against a really tough guy like Stanich, I've been looking forward to that match.

He's a super tough kid. He's a great wrestler. He's got great coaches, great partners. When you got that combo it's going to be a tough match-up with that kid.

There's some things I've got to do better tomorrow, but at the end of the day, in an NCAA Tournament, sometimes you've got to take the wins there.

Q. You're a two-time national champion. How do you stay hungry?

JESSE MENDEZ: I'm big on self-evaluation. I never want to be complacent. I'm constantly looking at my wrestling and finding spots that I can get better, looking at my mindset. Maybe there's something where I had a mental slip in a match, and I've got to adjust that.

I'm always trying to fortitude my mind and continue to add little nuances to my wrestling.

Q. In that match tonight, being tied 1-1 and going into sudden death, what was going through your mind knowing how much was at stake?

JESSE MENDEZ: Honestly the only thing going through my head was get a score. You can't overcomplicate it. You can't think about what's going wrong in a match or what's going right, it's get the next score. I'm thinking five seconds at a time.

When your mind slips, that's how you lose matches like that. I stayed focused and get to my ties and get to my shots.

Q. You just talked about this being the last rodeo, can you just talk about what you want to leave behind and how you want to be remembered at Ohio State?

JESSE MENDEZ: Yeah. One of my biggest goals was to win a team title and leave this team in better hands than when I got here. Even if we don't get that team title, I hope that the fans at Ohio State think I left it in a better spot.

I want people to look back and say that I left an impression on the team, left an impression on this team and wrestled and carried myself in a way that inspires others in the future. I think that's the biggest thing.

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