

# 2026 NCAA Wrestling Championship

Friday, March 20, 2026

Cleveland, Ohio, USA

Rocket Arena

## Stanford

## Aden Valencia

### Semifinals Media Conference



Aden Valencia (Stanford) d. Lachlan McNeil (Michigan),  
9-5

THE MODERATOR: Welcome to the 2026 NCAA Division I wrestling championships press conference. We're excited to be joined by Aden Valencia from Stanford.

Aden, I was wondering if you can reflect on the past couple days, your match tonight, and what it means to you to compete in the championship tomorrow.

ADEN VALENCIA: I mean, wow, really exciting. It's been -- for me it's been a little bit of an up-and-down season. I think going into this tournament, my coaches, my partners, my family helped me do all the right things, and obviously myself as well.

I was locked in. I was focused. At the end of the day, everything leads to this tournament. I was ready to go when I needed to be.

I'm excited to be here, and I'm excited to let it rip tomorrow.

**Q. I believe you are Coach Ayres' first finalist at Stanford, correct? Tell me how that feels and what it means to the program. Tell me how it feels to be coached by Coach Ayres.**

ADEN VALENCIA: I didn't think about that, but I guess it's true. I'm really proud of myself, our staff for helping me get here. I think this is the best staff in the country. They've helped me make so many jumps. Like I said, it's been an up-and-down year, but they've stuck with me and believed in me.

I could go down the list of guys, but I've had so many conversations. Ayres tells me every day, You're going to be a national champion. Every day, after a loss, after a win, no matter what happens, he always tells me you're going to be a national champion. Aden is my guy. Roll

with him.

Guys get annoyed because at least twice a week I'm always grabbing him. He's been a tremendous help to help me get to this level.

Gray, another incredible guy, works with me on all kinds of positions. I work really closely with him, and we go over all the little things, all the jumps I need to make, and the ones that we're seeing at this tournament is progress that I made with him.

Brock has always been really hard on me sometimes. I'm still young, so as a kid, I still mess up on things, maybe not showing up on time to things. He holds me accountable and sees a lot of himself in me. He stays hard on me. They've all helped me grow. I could go down the list.

Incredible staff, incredible partners.

**Q. Aden, you've talked multiple times about your up-and-down season, but every match in this tournament, you've looked great. What changed to make you peak right now?**

ADEN VALENCIA: I think -- I know I've said it, but a think a big part of it was just having the right people around me. I remember, I think it was after the Buesgens match. My match against Buesgens. I hope I'm not messing up his name. I remember feeling like I should have been in the match, and I remember it was kind of pretty lopsided score. It was one of the worst losses I'd taken in the season.

I remember going back and being confused. I saw my dad in the parking lot. I ran and cried in his arms. I was trying to figure myself out. Couldn't figure it out. I went to dinner with him and my mom. He sat me down and said, to compete at this level, every guy is not good, they're great. Every guy can win. Every single guy here is capable of squeaking their way to a national title.

Really what separates the best from every other guy doing every single little thing right. So I think going into this tournament, throughout the season I kind of had that stacking effect. Lost a couple, but we tweak this area.

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Lost another one, but we fix this. Throughout the season slowly getting better and better.

Even last week, ACC, I give up a stupid cut away. Something I practice a hundred times, cutting out on an escape, and turn it out, ran away, gave up a score. Those little things, they stack. Eventually putting them all together for this tournament, it shows. It showed today and yesterday and hopefully tomorrow.

**Q. Aden, you put up a lot of points for this tournament. Really offensive, and an exciting style you bring to the game. Can you talk about that mentality of coming into this tournament, being offensive and aggressive, but also remaining consistent in those tight matches? Also, if you have thoughts on your finals opponent Shayne Van Ness as well.**

ADEN VALENCIA: I love scoring points. If I'm being honest, my favorite style is freestyle. Everybody knows Aden is a little more of a freestyle guy. It's all in the feet. Ever since I was young, I loved watching the international guys. Musukaev, Otoguro. Ono has been one of my big watches. I love watching the craft and specifically the feet. I love scoring really cool takedowns. It's part of what I enjoy with this sport.

I know how excited I get in the room when I hit a really cool one. I love scoring points. I love the art. I love the craft.

Then about my opponent tomorrow, it's someone I wrestled before. I know what to expect. It's going to be high intensity, high pace. He's a guy that comes out, doesn't gas. He's going to bring it. I'm ready to go for that. I'm ready to go every second. I'm ready to die for this. Whatever happens out there, I'm going hard. I'm excited to clash with him again.

**Q. One of the nice things about -- one of the things that makes Shayne unique is he can accelerate. He can also decelerate. You talked a little bit ago about being a champion. The difference in these tournaments is being a lot of the little things. One of the little things is that mental chess, being able to understand and keep that discipline. How do you prepare for a match like that where you know you can probably see varying styles and being able to set the tone in that match?**

ADEN VALENCIA: Obviously this is a guy I was expecting to face in this exact moment. He's been on the radar since the very beginning of the year. Everything that I do within my training, my strength training is prepared for this kind of matchup.

He's a guy that's going to pull on my neck. I can't tell you how many hundred thousand neck raises I've done throughout the course of the season. He's a guy that's going to snap a lot. I work my core a lot.

It's a matchup I was expecting. This is a guy that's gone undefeated this year, right? I know how good he is. I was really ready for this match. Eyes on the prize for this guy since the beginning of the season.

Again, working on myself and my own leg attacks, it starts there. I've got to get there first. My coaches, my strength coaches, my parents, we've been preparing for this match. I'm ready to go, and I'm excited.

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