

# 2026 NCAA Wrestling Championship

Friday, March 20, 2026

Cleveland, Ohio, USA

Rocket Arena

## Penn State

## Mitchell Mesenbrink

### Semifinals Media Conference



Mitchell Mesenbrink (Penn State) d. Cesar Alvan (Columbia), 15-0

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by Mitchell Mesenbrink from Penn State. I wonder if you could reflect on the past couple days, tonight, and competing for a championship.

MITCHELL MESENBRINK: It's cool to be here for a third time, the whole NCAA tournament. I think what makes it even more special are the people who are with me. The people who love me for who I am, not what I am. I understand that in 48 hours when everything is said and done and I'm back home, that list of people is not going to change win or lose.

I really appreciate those people, and I hold those people really close to my heart.

Wrestling has been fun. That's been the main goal is to enjoy it. That's all I've got for now.

**Q. How has chess impacted your wrestling?**

MITCHELL MESENBRINK: Yeah, I really enjoy chess. Got a lot of buddies at my space that try to play me. We have a good time at local cafes and stuff.

I think one of the biggest things is that just people in sports psyche, in facets where people are striving for their excellence, people at the top of whatever particular facet, whether it be chess or music or wrestling or volleyball or whatever are actually closer together in their perspectives than people maybe just starting out in those facets.

I really enjoy listening to grandmasters and stuff in chess and hear how they talk about it and how pressure can build on the chessboard. I think stylistically and strategically and technically speaking, chess is very similar to wrestling. You've got guys who are very passive and they'll wrestle like that or guys that will attack and go get it. You can see

that in chess. You can see that in sports as a whole.

**Q. To you, what makes wrestling an art? What makes wrestling an art?**

MITCHELL MESENBRINK: That's a good question. I think like St. Francis of Assisi said something about how, when you're using your mind, your soul, and your hands, that's when it's art. And I think the way that I wrestle is very soulfully. It's not just a reflection of my mind or my technique or hands, my physical. It's a soulful thing as well.

I think that's a strong testament of how I attack every challenge in my life, 100 percent, and trying to glorify our Creator while doing it.

**Q. Kind of dovetailing off the previous question, I spoke with Jesse Mendez after his bout, and I asked him about the Hodge. He said guys like you and him are very much alike because you guys are artisans of your craft. There's a deep, deep meaning towards that. Talk about that mindset of someone that is dominant at their craft. What is that like? Kind of describe that.**

MITCHELL MESENBRINK: Yeah, that's a good question. Just a summation of what they -- like I said, the mind, the body, and the spirit or soul that they put into their craft and what they do.

At the same time, the Hodge is a -- I like wrestling because, for the most part, I can keep pretty much everybody else's opinion out of it. That's how I wrestle too, so the refs don't have to go, oh, is it blank, is it takedown or not? I am going to make sure it's there.

The Hodge is such an opinionated thing, such a futile kind of thing at the end of the day that people vote on. I'm not going to put my hope or well-being into something that people are going to vote and think about.

It's a cool thing, but yet again I think -- it's interesting because come Sunday night and Monday night or even when they crown the Hodge trophy, then they're going to be talking about who's going to get it the next time. It's just

like we're talking about things that come and go, collect dust. Ben has one at AWA back in Wisconsin, and all the arms are snapped off it because all the kids that come to AWA play with it.

I think that's a good representation of what trophies do. They just sit, wear, and collect dust.

**Q. Man of many talents. You wrestle fantastically, play chess, also a singer. Tell us do you have an interest in going into the music industry maybe after wrestling?**

MITCHELL MESENBRINK: Yeah, I really enjoy music, and I really enjoy the different aspects that it offers compared to wrestling. Obviously like you're going out there and battling someone's will, and you've got to take them out. There's the weight aspect. There's all different aspects.

I think I really like what music has to offer. Yeah, I really -- I have a lot of great people on my side that, like I said, that love me for who I am and not what I am, and those people are helping me as we speak to get better at music.

Not only that, I feel like it offers an out from wrestling. Not in a bad way, but like wrestling is a very like niche community. So people are so like it's all or none. So like it's cool to have an out. It's cool to have something else where I'm sure there's diehard music fans that are all or none about that too. I just kind of try to stay out of those things, the theatrics and politics of it all.

But, yes, I would like to be a musician afterwards.

**Q. Mitchell, when Penn State builds a team lead like it has in this tournament, you're usually a big reason why. For fans, they worry about the team race than you guys winning individual championships.**

MITCHELL MESENBRINK: Maybe more.

**Q. From a wrestler's perspective, is that something you keep track of, something you worry about, or something you focus on when you're done competing for a tournament?**

MITCHELL MESENBRINK: Interesting question. It's the same thing as the brackets. I haven't looked at the bracket. I might not even look at the bracket after the tournament is done. I think -- I learned this my freshman year because like a lot of the guys I loved on that team like AB and Brooks, Greg Kirkfleet and Carter, Bill Bartlett and all those guys who were seniors on that -- obviously some of those guys had more years.

But those handful of guys, it was like, when I first got here, because I had watched Penn State wrestling for so long, and as you're saying -- we both said -- fans, I think, care more. I haven't looked at the team race. I don't know what the team race is. I don't know what team points are up on the board right now. I don't know how far ahead we are.

I think it's like when I learned -- when I first got here, it's like, oh, wait, everybody just kind of does their thing, and things kind of take care of themselves.

There's a cool quote, it's like you worry too much for someone who figures it out every single time. I really like that. It's like why worry about something when it's going to come to be either way. It's just like giving our best effort. I think as a collective our guys know that.

But they also, the biggest thing, they know that wrestling is not everything.

**Q. You mentioned having fun while you wrestle, coming in here defending national champion, No. 1 seed. Do you try to strike a balance between having fun and taking care of business, or is it more of, if I have fun, business will take care of itself?**

MITCHELL MESENBRINK: Both. It's definitely a mix of the two. I think -- I've been doing it for 18 years now. Well, pretty much my whole life, so 22 years, but 18 with practice and stuff. I think, when you're about it -- that's kind of what we were talking about, what Jesse Mendez was saying. When you're about it, I think you have to focus on other aspects like fun and things like that.

Now this whole year has been a really, really big thing like, why would I not enjoy something that I'm doing? It sounds very easy to say because obviously we all have toils and we all have adversity and adversity is going to strike. This year was no different than anybody else's journey of that toil and adversity and endeavors.

I think that toil -- and Ecclesiastes talks about finding enjoyment in our toils. That's the biggest thing, I want to enjoy what I do. That doesn't mean it's going to be easy, but at least I want to enjoy it because, at the end of the day, winning and losing is going to take care of itself and whoever does that.

Truthfully, truthfully, that's one of the biggest things when I talk to my parents or my best friends or my brother and my best friend and my coaches before I go out there, it's like, dude, why on earth would we not be doing this? Why on earth would we be doing this if it wasn't fun?

**Q. Mitchell, you talked about coming to Penn State a little bit ago. Before you came to Penn State, you started out at Cal Baptist, and this weekend is the last weekend for that program. Have you been keeping up on that situation, and what do you think it says about the wrestling landscape?**

MITCHELL MESENBRINK: Not too much. Kind of the music point, my social media is pretty much like music and surfing on the beach. I don't really see much of that. Obviously I heard the unfortunate news about that. I haven't really been keeping up too much of the details of it.

Obviously it's unfortunate because we want wrestling at a high level and some of the highest levels. It's unfortunate. I think those strong people that are there, I think they'll figure it out, and they'll continue to whatever that plan is. We've been talking about the plan, the greater plan of everything, they'll be in that plan, and they'll also be able to readjust and refocus on the things they can keep doing for our sport.

I hope that everything's okay because I know it's not easy. It's more than just a sport. Some of those people have jobs and trying to feed their families and stuff.

**Q. You brought ten here, eight in the semifinals. You're one of the ones who got through to the finals so far. Just your thoughts on the way you guys have come down here and have represented the way you have.**

MITCHELL MESENBRINK: I'm really appreciative of the guys I get to be around. It's not unfair to say that we've assembled a super team of savages and people that can take people out. But at the same time, I think the biggest thing is that we enjoy and we have fun.

Again, like I said, we know this isn't the only thing in our lives or in life. I think it's very easy to short sight that and think that right now is the most important thing to ever exist on planet earth, but it's just not.

I'm really appreciative of not only the guys, but the coaches that continue to do that every single year. I don't know how long I'll be a part of it. I'm just very appreciative and grateful that I get to be a part of it now.

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