

2026 NCAA Wrestling Championship

Friday, March 20, 2026

Cleveland, Ohio, USA

Rocket Arena

Iowa

Mikey Caliendo

Semifinals Media Conference

Mikey Caliendo (Iowa) d. Joey Blaze (Purdue) 8-5

THE MODERATOR: Welcome to the 2026 NCAA Division I wrestling championships press conference. We're joined tonight by Mikey Caliendo from Iowa.

Mikey, if you could reflect on the past couple days, what it's meant to you, and competing tomorrow in the championship.

MIKEY CALIENDO: It's a tough tournament. It's very exciting. I'm grateful I get the opportunity to wrestle here. It's been fun. Ready to get it done tomorrow. I'm excited.

Q. Mikey, you fell to him earlier in the year, to Joey Blaze. Is there anything you took from that match that helped you in this one?

MIKEY CALIENDO: Of course. I kind of know what he's looking for. Obviously I've got that feel from wrestling him earlier. Yeah, just wrestled with a little bit of a chip on my shoulder this time, and I was a little bit more prepared. And I rose to the occasion.

Q. Ben Kueter and Gabe Arnold won their matches. That's seven All-Americans for Iowa right now. That's the most All-Americans since 2021. What is it about this team the last few days that you feel is able to flip the script the way you want it to be by getting seven guys on the podium?

MIKEY CALIENDO: I'm so proud of those guys, especially Arnold getting on the podium, maybe not his best weight class, but fighting to get on the podium is awesome. I'm so proud of those guys.

We're a family at the end of the day. We rub off on one another. Yeah, I mean, that mentality, that drive to want to win. When we're all together, I think we lift each other up and get each other ready to compete.



When you're with a bunch of your brothers at a tournament like this, you're all going through grinders and matches, and I mean it kind of pumps you up seeing your brothers win. That sometimes can help you wrestle a lot better.

Q. Mikey, walk us through that overtime takedown and how it felt to get that.

MIKEY CALIENDO: I was feeling great in that third period, in that overtime go. I'm not going to say I wasn't tired, but I was still feeling pretty fresh. I was ready to get after it. Yeah, that's all there is to it. I wanted it more, and I wrestled the match -- I wrestled a lot better of a match. It was more on my terms.

I'm happy with how it turned out. I gave up an early takedown, but just continued to get after it and never counted myself out. I know deep down in my heart that I'm one of the best wrestlers in the world. So I'm never out of a match.

Q. Mitchell Mesenbrink is an opponent you're familiar with over the last couple of years. You haven't gotten that one to go your way. How do you prepare for a match like that when it's happened as often as it has and hasn't gone your way to this point?

MIKEY CALIENDO: He's a good wrestler, but sometimes all it takes is one match, right? If there's any one time I'm going to get him, this is going to be the time. I rise to the occasion in front of this big crowd, national finals, I'd be pretty happy if this is the one I get, even if it's only once.

This is the time when I'm going to go out there and wrestle my best. Yeah, I'm excited to get this match again.

Q. In these high pressure situations, what kind of feedback are you getting from your coaches corner?

MIKEY CALIENDO: I don't know if it's as much feedback as it is encouragement. We work on positions that I get into matches every single day. They're just there to pump me up, maybe give me a little bit of reminders.

Man, I love seeing them get pumped up after a good win like that. Looking back, seeing my coaches just as excited as I am. That's something that you never forget.

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