

2026 NCAA Wrestling Championship

Friday, March 20, 2026

Cleveland, Ohio, USA

Rocket Arena

Penn State

Rocco Welsh

Semifinals Media Conference



Rocco Welsh (Penn State) d. Brock Mantanona (Michigan), 4-3

THE MODERATOR: Welcome to the 2026 NCAA wrestling championships press conference. We have Rocco Welsh from Penn State.

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

ROCCO WELSH: It's been a great -- last couple days has been great. The whole season has been great too, just being with Penn State and being around all the top guys. It's just really helped me have a good perspective on what I need to do in the big moments and stuff.

The hard work's paying off. Just one more to finish the job. I'm excited.

Q. Rocco, throughout the season it just seems you have this immaculate clutch gene. It seems like you're in the jaws of defeat, but then you get to the thrills of victory. What goes through your mind in those tense moments to keep you poised to deliver each time?

ROCCO WELSH: I think it's like a lot of self talk. Leading up to the tournament, there's conversations that you're having with yourself. I think those really pay off in the big moments, and even during the match, if something doesn't go your way, you have to have reset words that help you stay focused and stuff.

Also, you've got to be able to execute. That's where practice comes into play, executing under pressure when you're tired, fatigued and stuff. We do it every day in the room, so it's no big deal to do it out here.

Q. You and your teammates are so proficient on defense, and yet you still score a lot of points. Why do

you think you and your teammates are able to do that so well?

ROCCO WELSH: I think the best defense is a lot of offense. Sometimes guys are going to get in on our legs and stuff. It's just technique really, a little bit of toughness.

We have the best coaches in the world, so everybody has the best technique. Then you've just got to be tough and put it together, and you've got it.

Q. Rocco, you've been here before a couple years ago. What has it taken to get back to this point for you, long journey over two years? I'm sure you've thought about this moment a lot, and now you're here again.

ROCCO WELSH: Last year was pretty tough sitting out watching everybody. I think it was just God just making me wait a little bit. He's got something bigger in store for me.

So I'm really grateful for the journey that God has brought me on. Like I said, it was a tough year and a half or however long it was just sitting, watching everyone compete.

The main thing for me was just staying focused, made goals for myself, even though it wasn't NCAA champ last year. It was just make small goals, do the open tournaments, show up every day for practice, stay motivated, even though there's not a lot to work for, because it's going to pay off down the road which is right now.

Q. Like you just said, you were there two years ago in the national finals. Now you're going in as the favorite. Are you viewing it any differently? Is it any different now on the opposite side of that matchup?

ROCCO WELSH: My freshman year, true freshman year, it was just a super -- it was a freakin' movie. Didn't have too many expectations. Obviously I knew how good I am at stuff. That bracket was loaded and stuff. Never really been to a tournament like this. So I didn't have that many expectations. I was kind of star struck a little bit. Now I'm super confident. Just confident in everything really.

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My diet, sleep, taking care of all the small things. Kind of just a maturity thing too, staying off social media, just doing everything right. It's no big deal.

After tomorrow, hopefully everything pays off.

Q. How does being at Penn State throughout the season prepare you for big moments like this, competing in the NCAA finals?

ROCCO WELSH: It's really just the partners. We have the best partners in the world, Olympic champs, Olympic medalists, NCAA champions. Obviously the best coaches, like I've said numerous times.

I think just being in the room wrestling those top guys on a daily basis, it's just like none of these other teams are doing that. They might have some good partners, but it's just not the same. You have no bad partners. It's just really tough to do for college. I think that's just the biggest difference is just, yeah, every day, great partners.

Q. You're going to have Max McEnelly in the NCAA finals. You had a really close Big Ten final with him. What's your plan to potentially widen that gap?

ROCCO WELSH: Not much different. I need to open up a little bit, though. Positioning, everything was good. I think I did most of the stuff right. I think I could open up a little bit more.

Because that's when I'm at my best. I'm confident. Not really relying on my own strength, but relying on Jesus Christ's strength, my Father in heaven. Just relying on Him and not my own strength and stuff like that.

Just got to be confident, trust in His plan, and it's all going to work out in the end.

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