

2026 NCAA Wrestling Championship

Friday, March 20, 2026

Cleveland, Ohio, USA

Rocket Arena

Oklahoma State

Cody Merrill

Semifinals Media Conference



Cody Merrill (Oklahoma State) d. Stephen Little (Little Rock), 3-2

THE MODERATOR: Welcome to the 2026 NCAA Division I wrestling championships press conference. We're excited to welcome Cody Merrill from Oklahoma State.

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

CODY MERRILL: I think the last couple days I've gone through a few losses so far this season, and I think I came to this tournament with a fresh start with the same goal I had at the beginning of the season and when I first started college wrestling and when I was a little kid, just become a national champ.

I think nothing changed at all. I stepped into the tournament with the same mentality I had at the beginning of the season. Just took it match by match, and it seems to be the night.

Q. Cody, four Oklahoma State freshmen in the finals tomorrow. What does that say about not only where this program is now but where it's going to be in the future?

CODY MERRILL: It has a lot to say. Last year our team last year full of seniors took third at this tournament. We're right there again with the class of freshmen now. I think we have a good future ahead of us. We just continue to work, continue to compete, and just get better.

I think with this young class we have, we want to be the best in the world. We're all working on the same goal. It's just fun.

Q. Piggy-backing off of this question, this young team, how are you going to inspire this next generation of

middle school, high school wrestlers?

CODY MERRILL: I think the stereotype when we're younger, typically upperclassmen do better, but with this new generation of young, talented wrestlers, it just shows us that we can compete with anybody.

We don't care who we're wrestling. We just go out there to compete how we want to wrestle and have fun.

Q. Cody, as you've navigated your way to the finals, what is the biggest takeaway you've gotten from this whole experience?

CODY MERRILL: I think the biggest takeaway for me was refusing to be denied and just wrestling through all my obstacles, whether whoever we're wrestling, no matter what their seed is or what happens within this tournament, upsets or what not, just not change how I wrestle, wrestle who I want to wrestle no matter who's in front of me.

Q. Obviously a tense match. You had a close moment where it looked like you might have been taken down and you weren't. Kind of take us through the emotions or just the mental approach and the overtime there.

CODY MERRILL: I think with this, the whole -- the control with the takedown -- we call it hot stove in the room where we kind of just wrestle through the position. Whether it's a takedown or not, we wrestle through all the positions. I think just doing that in the room and being comfortable in getting into dangerous positions and continue wrestling through it, that has helped me a lot.

Just staying poised, whether they called it a takedown or they didn't, my mindset is just wrestle the next position if I get the opportunity to. If not, then just back to work.

Q. Obviously the season has its ups and downs throughout the year. Can you talk about how you and your teammates come in and are wrestling their best in the biggest moments of the year. Your semifinal is a good example of that.

CODY MERRILL: We try to wrestle it the same way. We

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don't change anything. We envision these moments when things get tough. We practice the visualization, the situations in the room. With us just thinking about it in our head mentally, we've almost lived through the situation multiple times, and we're ready for these types of obstacles that might come across.

Q. Can you talk about Josh Barr in the finals? What's your history with him, and what's your game plan going into that match?

CODY MERRILL: I've never wrestled him. I've had a couple matches against guys he's wrestled. I'm just excited to wrestle. I'm wrestling for a national title, and nothing changes. I wrestle how I want to wrestle, and nothing changes.

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