

2026 NCAA Wrestling Championship

Saturday, March 21, 2026

Cleveland, Ohio, USA

Rocket Arena

Aden Valencia

Finals Media Conference



149

Aden Valencia (Stanford) d. Shayne Van Ness (Penn State), 8-5 (SV1)

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by the 149 national champion, Aden Valencia, from Stanford. We'll start with an opening remark from Aden. When you got the final call that you were now the national champion, what was going through your head and your journey to get here?

ADEN VALENCIA: Relief. That's the first word that comes to mind, relief. It's been -- I've talked about this in my previous interview, but it's been a crazy season. It's been a really up-and-down season. Even the year before that, I experienced some adversity in my personal life.

Just to be able to put it all together and do the right things and go through the process and find my way here through, obviously, myself and the people around me, my coaches, my partners, my sister, my best friend back home, my parents -- to be able to figure it out and do what I know I'm born to do and capable of doing, it's just a relief.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. You're the first national champion under Coach Ayres and I believe the first since 2021. How does it feel to leave your legacy on Stanford -- I think it's his birthday too, right? It's not?

ADEN VALENCIA: Thank God, I didn't say happy birthday.

Q. False alarm. How does it feel to have left your legacy like this on Stanford?

ADEN VALENCIA: When they recruited me, the previous coaching staff and the new one that came in, they recruited me for a reason. And they thought I could bring this program up. I feel like I've helped do that this weekend. Obviously with winning this national title, and just speaking about our team, ourselves, just all around some incredible

performances.

I mean, I'm honestly blown away by all of our guys, Consiglio had an incredible season, winning ACCs and doing really well here. E.J., probably one of the craziest moves. He's one of my best friends in the world. And I had to take his spot for 149 to win this title.

But he made the grownup decision of wrestling 65. He put on probably one of the most remarkable shows I've ever seen at this level. And I'm really proud of him.

Daniel Cardenas is a (expletive) hero to me. I look up to him maybe more than anybody out there. And he didn't get what he wanted this year, but he's going to get it next year.

Moving up the rankings, Guffey, 174, did some incredible stuff. And grew is an athlete this year and found a way to win tough matches.

Abe, another guy, multiple injuries. Found a way to come back and win some matches, placing at ACCs and making his way here.

Go up and down the lineup, heavyweights. Obviously Nico third-place finish, incredible, shows major adversity, coming back all the way. Same with Knox. Some shocking wins.

But we just have an incredible team and an incredible staff. I'm glad to be the first of many national champs for Stanford University and I want to continue this momentum next year.

Q. That match was awesome, back and forth, just a really great match to watch, a lot of points, a lot of action. Can you talk about the challenge that Van Ness presented as you're in those flurries and how you were able to get it done in those moments? And, number two, your style as an offensive wrestler, how does that -- how do you approach that, I guess, because that's something that as a fan of the sport, it's really enjoyable to watch.

ADEN VALENCIA: Yeah. I'll start by saying he's an

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incredible athlete. Going into this match, I knew there was just a few ways I was going to beat him. It basically rolled out the way I planned it to.

But I mean, he's really hard to score on. He's really hard to wrestle. He's a guy that's really dynamic. He's athletic. He's got an incredible gas tank, and he's strong, which is a combination that you don't see in many athletes. He's honestly a freak.

I talked to my coaches before the match, my dad, Kraft back home, Jason Kraft, give him a shout-out. And we talked about this match-up and what I needed to do. And I executed and I got the job done.

If I'm being honest, midway through the match, I wasn't really sure how I was going to pull it off. I just knew I was. I believed in myself. I knew this was my time. I told myself that going out on the mat. I'm going to win, it's just a matter of how. And I did. I'm really proud of myself.

Going into the style, I talked about this last interview, I love scoring points. I have watched all the international guys. I love freestyle and I love scoring on my feet. I remember growing up as a kid, my drill, my drill set, with my dad and my sister, it consisted of probably like 50 different attacks.

At the time I didn't know a lot of them. I remember I'd call like an outside step, we'd call it a swan, because it was like the motion of a swan flapping its wings. Just like a bunch of attacks and stuff like that. So that's really where my offensive ability was developed as a young kid, is through that drill set that we did. Yeah, just altogether love scoring on my feet. Love scoring points.

Q. Can you just walk us through that overtime takedown and the emotions you felt once you got it?

ADEN VALENCIA: It was the most -- actually, I don't know if one of the coaches has my phone, but this is something, hopefully if they pull it up, I'd like to read it. You have my phone? Let's go. Good timing. I'll give you guys a little background in the meantime.

For my class, I wrote a story -- a literature class, but I wrote this about a month ago, a 20-page paper. Basically it's a story that you have to come up with.

And I decided to make it about a wrestler who goes up and down throughout his year, has to figure himself out. And the format of it is a six-month season condensed into a seven-minute match, and I'll read the last part of it.

I believe in manifestation, and I believe in the law of attraction. I wrote this a moment ago. I'm going to pull it

up for you guys right now. It's the last paragraph.

"Three points fly up. A few seconds left on the clock and the crowd is on their feet. I close my eyes. For one beat, everything disappears, the lights, the noise, the pressure, the chaos, and all I can hear is my own breath, the same breath that I use to calm myself before every war. Then it hits me all at once, the whistle, the war, my coaches screaming, my teammates going wild on the sideline. I open my eyes, and the scoreboard confirms what my body already knows. I did it. I (expletive) did it.

"Every doubt, every bad week. Every late night. Every loss that made me question who I was, all of it crashes over me and breaks into something new. I'm laughing and crying at the same time, pounding my chest. I point to the crowd, point to my corner, I flex every emotion. My soul is let out by a scream that follows. Six months determines in seven minutes. I feel clean and my work is done."

I wrote that a month ago. I manifested this moment. I dreamed of it. I knew I could do it. I believed in myself. And I'm proud to say that I did it.

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