

2026 NCAA Wrestling Championship

Saturday, March 21, 2026

Cleveland, Ohio, USA

Rocket Arena

Mitchell Mesenbrink

Finals Media Conference

157

Mitchell Mesenbrink (Penn State) tech. fall Mikey Caliendo (Iowa), 20-4

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by the 165 national champion, Mitchell Mesenbrink, from Penn State.

Mitchell, when you heard that final whistle blow and you realized you were a national champion, what were the first thoughts that went through your head and your journey to get here?

MITCHELL MESENBRINK: I don't know. I feel like my "why" this whole season could be summed up into this quote, like, "Sometimes it takes obtaining the goal to realize that the goal was not the thing to be obtained."

Before I lose you, let me try to explain that. I feel like sometimes we think that becoming a national champion or an Olympic champion, or whatever your goal that you set out to be, making X amount of money or whatever, it's truly never as fulfilling as you think it is. And it definitely can't be the thing that you fill your soul and fill your cup with.

This past year, I had some of the toughest times I've ever had in my young life, and besides making the USA team for seniors, I won almost everything that I wanted to. And I think that sums up exactly what I was saying with that quote, that no matter how many wins or things or amount of money or whatever infinite number of something that you can gain, that was not the point of all of it.

And this year I really, really just wanted to enjoy it. I did not come to do my will, but to do the will of the one who sent me. And that's kind of a summation of being out there, the people that are around me and this year.

Q. Going off that, why do you think people put so much emphasis on these tangibles, these things that don't really matter?



MITCHELL MESENBRINK: Because I think we're meant to serve. We're meant to serve something greater than ourselves. And we get there -- like this is going to feel good for about a day. And I know on Monday, what are they going to be talking about. They'll either be talking about the Hodge or who's going to win next year. It's constantly next thing, next thing, next thing.

When you live in a world that's so on to the next, you realize that the people that you thought cared so much about XYZ, they actually don't care that much, because their attention span is already on to the next thing.

That's not a dis on any particular person, we all do that, that's just human nature. And I think we're trying to fill a God-shaped hole in our life. And I think that's as much as I can hit it -- the head of the nail right there. That's the best I can say it. I think we're trying to fill a God-shaped hole with something that isn't God.

Q. What kind of freedom do those realizations give you?

MITCHELL MESENBRINK: All of it. This is something that I've thought in these last two weeks. When you give up control and you surrender to God and you understand it's not your will and it's another plan, right, you actually gain all the control. When you're constantly, I've gotta do it this way, it's got to be my way or the highway, and it's got to be this, this, this, you're actually making a prisoner in your own mind.

It's funny, I don't really like check comments, but the one time that I checked the comments, it was like, oh, shut up, just stick to wrestling and all this stuff. And it's just funny, because, dude, I'm way more than a wrestler. It's about who I am, not what I am.

And maybe you see I've been so thankful that I've been able to share a little bit of my singing and my music and stuff and to show people that it's not just about wrestling for me.

There's so many other things in life that can be important. And I just think that we're trying to chase after these finites,

ASAP sports . . . when all is said, we're done.®

these things that will never ever fill our cup, to the nth degree, to the way that God and Jesus Christ will.

Q. What is your creative process when learning and developing technique?

MITCHELL MESENBRINK: Yeah, I think it has to be exactly that. It has to be a creative process. Coach Clay, our manager -- not like a team manager, but our general manager -- his dad is an artist. I think both of his parents are artists.

And his dad was talking about how, when you go to work or you do something, like you're doing homework or whatever, you go from A to B. It's like, all right, I've clocked in, I've clocked out, I'm done.

When it's something with art, it's an ever-growing process, it's an ever-continuing process that when you go into practice and you want to enjoy it and you want to develop technique, you're not focused on, okay, when am I out of here? When's 3:00 rolling around so I can roll out? It's an ever-growing process that never fully just -- it's not done. Keep having fun and you keep enjoying it.

Q. After your win, we saw you in the stands celebrating with some fans. Tell us what it's like -- and your family -- tell us what it's like to have that kind of support behind you.

MITCHELL MESENBRINK: It's that family. That's one of the biggest things. Like, I know that when I look back on these times with this past year, I know it won't be anything about bonus points or winning. It will be about sitting in my hotel room with my dad and my mom and my siblings.

Yesterday we talked about adversity, and this year hasn't been easy at all, like I said. And I think that's when you need to pull those people that are closest to you and that God's pulling into your life. I just really love and appreciate those people that I know God sent into my life, maybe pulled out of my life, too.

I'm just really appreciative of God and those people that continue to support me and love me for I know who I am and not what I do. So if nothing went my way this weekend, I know those people that were with me are going to be there today as well.

Q. I talked to David Taylor yesterday. I asked him, they kind of go the opposite directions. You already alluded to the being free of being bothered by comments, social media. Your coaching staff does an excellent job of keeping you guys away. Oklahoma State has gone the other direction. They're filming

everything. Everything's out there. Stilly Boys, Cowboys. It's the big big branding campaign. You guys are the exact opposite. Do you like being free from the outside noise? Does it keep it distraction-free for you?

MITCHELL MESENBRINK: I don't know. It's funny because me and Coach Clay were laughing about it the other day, I posted a TikTok on Wednesday or something. I was able to bring my guitar on this trip and stuff.

I just like the freedom that the coaches give you that you can go in as much as you want, or not.

And it's funny, though, Coach Cael did say, Instagram and social media are going to be there after the three days. It's not like they're leaving. It's not like its leaving, whatever platform you love.

So, I don't know, to each their own. I'm not really going to comment on anybody else's thing because, again, to each their own. What fills someone else's cup might not for the other person. So personally, I love Penn State and I love how the coaches do it.

Q. On a night where we're seeing these freshmen take hold of the early weight classes, we're seeing top guys, seniors, fall by the wayside at the end, you are maintaining your edge and you're still at the top. How are you able to stay so consistent?

MITCHELL MESENBRINK: Thanks for the question. I think, it's like I said, it's just a culmination of your perspective. At the end of the day, there's life after wrestling. No matter about a Hodge or an NCAA championship or the next best thing you want to get, at the end of the day, there's always going to be something that you're going to place higher, you're going to get past it, and I want this now, I want this now, and I want this now.

And once you realize that, you realize that it's like, all right, so then what's there to gain? Well, big thing is you get off the rat wheel, and then you start feeding into the other things that are intangibles to the soul and the spirit like love and joy and peace and wanting to obtain those things.

Because again fulfillment when you're talking about demonic pleasure, not just hedonic, like a quick fix of something, like a piece of pizza or something, talking about full-on impact of, like, you know, things like being a dad and a husband or graduating college, or something like this as well, where you work really, really long time to try to get something.

At the end of the day you just know that it's probably not

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

going to bring as much fulfillment as, like I said, sitting in the hotel room with my parents. You know, it was awesome. My dad read me something that our legacy is not -- it's not, you know, our triumphs or some type of fame. Legacy is not our fame but our faith.

And faith is an intangible, unseeable thing, and I just want to be a very faithful man, not only to my future wife or my family, but to also God.

Q. Wrestling or not, what was your favorite part about this weekend in Cleveland, what will you remember most from this tournament?

MITCHELL MESENBRINK: Sitting in my hotel room with my parents and between every single session, and then go in with my family to eat breakfast. And then I know tomorrow's going to church and they've got a really beautiful cathedral here. I'm really excited to go there with my family and go to church and have breakfast and all the things that if I won or lost today, we would still have done.

Riding back to State College, Happy Valley, with my best friend, Sam, and just really being present not in winning but present in the fruitfulness of people being healthy and just much greater things than winning a wrestling match.

Q. Levi Haines just won his national championship as well. You posted earlier about how you started off with rivals with him and now you've grown to be great friends. You kind of talk about him he's just finished his last match for your team?

MITCHELL MESENBRINK: That's awesome. It started with running through him through a table, him popping me in my face and us battling like that. I think that's some of the most manly relationships.

He's one of the biggest reasons why I went to Penn State when I went onto the visit and I talked to him and he's young. He's only 21, which is crazy nowadays when you have 26-year-olds in college. He's super, super young.

What I love about that is I'm older than him and I look at him and see how much of a mature man he is. And when I came on that official visit and we talked man to man or young man to young man, and he didn't even mention anything about it. He's like, I hope you come, we can be partners.

I love the guy. It's great to see him win. It's even cooler to see our faces up on the Penn State wall together and side by side for NCAA Championships.

The year he won, I didn't win. The year that I won, he

didn't win. Did I say that right? I won, he didn't win. He won, I didn't -- I won. We flip flopped.

So this year we win together and we win as a team. And now we've got Rocco and Josh and all the other guys, and Luke, and all those guys that go out there.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports Levi Haines.