

2026 NCAA Wrestling Championship

Saturday, March 21, 2026

Cleveland, Ohio, USA

Rocket Arena

Levi Haines

Finals Media Conference



174

Levi Haines (Penn State) d. Christopher Minto (Nebraska),
2-1

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by the 174 national
champion, Levi Haines, from Penn State.

When you heard the final whistle blow and realize that you
were the NCAA champion, what were the first thoughts that
went through your head and your journey to get here?

LEVI HAINES: I just had a lot of appreciation for my
support system. There's a lot more that goes into us
competing than us being out there wrestling. We have a
lot of people behind the scenes that don't get any credit.
So it was kind of almost like a memory reel of all those
people who kind of helped me along the way.

**Q. Being a home-grown kid, what does it mean to end
your Penn State career with a win, to be that kind of
person for the Central PA kids to look up to?**

LEVI HAINES: Yeah, I don't think it really mattered if I won
or lost. I think kids are smart enough that they just see you
for what you are and being yourself. I think just being real
when you're around those kids is way more important than
any wins or losses.

So just hope that they recognize that I was myself the
entire time and stayed calm and just went and took care of
business.

**Q. Can you just talk about the brotherhood that you
have with your Penn State teammates? And Mitchell
was just in here and told us the story about you
recruiting him. Just talk about that brotherhood. And
also for you being a part of all these team titles, you
end your career on top, but you're also still young,
relatively speaking, compared to a lot of the other
competitors. So the legacy that you hope you left here
in the state.**

LEVI HAINES: You know, I don't really get too caught up
in my legacy or anything. People are going to remember
me just how I treated them more so than how I competed.
I guess if you're going to talk about my legacy, I just hope
that everybody remembers me for treating them with
kindness and just being appreciative of what they've done
for me.

It's tough to speak to the brotherhood of Penn State
because I would do anything for each and every one of
those guys. I've had some tough moments in my career at
Penn State, but there's always been somebody there to
kind of pick me up along the way.

And just have a lot of experience there, guys who have
kind of been in your position and been there, done that. So
super grateful for all my teammates. And hopefully I can
give back to them just a little bit of what they've given to
me. I don't know if I'll ever be able to repay any of them.
But I'll try my best.

**Q. There wasn't a lot of action in that match until the
end there, when he started some flurries and trying to
get on you. But would you rather have that kind of
action throughout the whole match instead of just at
the very end, when he finally opened up?**

LEVI HAINES: Yeah, again, it's easy to sit back and say
you wish a guy wrestled like that the whole match. But he
had a game plan. He followed the game plan. Chris is a
tough competitor. So the match went the way it did. I don't
think I need to go back and change anything.

It happened the way it was supposed to. Maybe fans don't
find that super appealing or whatnot, but if you've been
around wrestling, you kind of understand that high IQ
chess match out there with styles and game plans and
stuff. So you can appreciate that match if you've been
around the sport long enough.

**Q. You've been saying throughout the weekend how
you don't plan on leaving Penn State anytime soon.
Just to clarify, does that mean you're planning on
joining the NOWC?**

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

LEVI HAINES: I've got to talk to a couple of the bosses first. Hopefully they'll let me stick around.

Q. What does it mean to be able to share this moment with your loved ones sitting in the front row right there?

LEVI HAINES: It means the world to me. They're the first people I see when I looked up. And they've been there for my lowest of lows and highest of highs. And I know the result doesn't change about how they feel about me.

I just appreciate that about them. There's been a lot of sacrifices that each and every one of them has done for me to chase my career. And really grateful for them. I probably won't be able to repay them in my lifetime, just hope they know I'm really grateful.

Q. I know you're an avid hunter. How do you compare wrestling and hunting?

LEVI HAINES: I tell people, it's two very different feelings. Both of them are amazing. And I can't imagine my life without either of them. So hunting is a big part of my life and wrestling is as well. And I think they both kind of go hand in hand with one another.

Q. I heard that walk-out song. Feels like there may have been a little symbolism -- momma, don't let your babies grow up to be cowboys, team behind you nipping at your heel, I don't know if they're really nipping at your heels, but the team behind you, Oklahoma State, the Cowboys, was there any symbolism there?

LEVI HAINES: I didn't even think about that till now. It's kind of funny, ironic, I guess, I just remember that song from -- my dad had a CD that song would play on. I always remember being really excited when that song would come on. And just kind of put my mind at ease. I guess just kind of took me back to a different place, a different time in my life. But no, I hope they don't take it that way. That doesn't look great, huh?

Q. That's literally what I thought. I thought, this guy is a genius. This is some mental warfare.

LEVI HAINES: No, I really appreciate each and every one of those guys. You know, David played a big part of my life. I want to see them do well. They've had a lot of guys doing really well tonight. And it's been kind of fun to watch his career as a coach progress, and there was really no symbolism behind it. Just a song I really liked.