

2026 NCAA Wrestling Championship

Saturday, March 21, 2026

Cleveland, Ohio, USA

Rocket Arena

Josh Barr

Finals Media Conference

197

Josh Barr (Penn State) d. Cody Merrill (Oklahoma State),
6-3

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by 197 national
champion Josh Barr from Penn State.

When you heard that final whistle and you realized you
were national champion, what was going through your
head and your journey to get here?

JOSH BARR: Like I told you guys yesterday, just grateful
for my Lord and savior, Jesus Christ. He's blessed me to
be in this position.

Before I walked out, I got déjà vu or whatever they call it. I
remember being in the tunnel last year and being so
grateful that I got to compete because I didn't know at last
year's Big Ten if I was going to be able to wrestle nationals.

I remember that moment and I got a lot of gratitude right
before I walked out there. And just really thankful and
grateful to be here, grateful that the Lord's blessed me with
the talents that he has. And it's only right that I give back
to Him because all this is His, and all this is going to come
and go. But Jesus Christ doesn't. So really grateful. I'm
grateful for Jesus.

**Q. You and your teammates, Mitchell and Levi, are all
front runners in the Hodge race. Is that a conversation
you have at all. Do you get competitive with it?**

JOSH BARR: Not really. I think we're focused on pushing
each other to be better and better every day. Super
grateful for all my teammates.

It's not really a conversation we have. I think we're just
focused on being the best we can be every single day and
getting better from match to match. And really grateful that
I get to be in that race with a couple of my best friends.



**Q. You had 100 percent bonus win rate on the season,
obviously up until now. What challenges did Cody
Merrill possess that made it hard to get a bonus on
him?**

JOSH BARR: Yeah, he's a tough kid. He wrestles in a
really good position and he has heavy hips. I think I
probably didn't open up as much in that match as I have
and in matches prior. I'll kick myself for that for a while, not
for the bonus rate or anything, just because I feel like I felt
a little bit out there probably. I'm not even breathing hard
right now, so I'm not really happy about that. I'd rather be
up here trying to catch my breath talking normal.

Yeah, he's a tough kid. And he's a freshman I believe and
so he'll be competing against him for the years to come.
Excited and grateful for that, and hopefully we can improve
on the next I can improve the next time I wrestle. Yeah, it
was good.

**Q. You meandered a little bit in weight. You came in
74, 84, you migrate up to 97. Now you're one of the
best guys pound for pound, two guys, in the country.
Could you have ever pictured it, at Davison, Michigan,
you'd come to Penn State and this would be your path,
you end up at 97? Was that in the plan, or that was
just kind of what happens, I grew, I got big, and I'm a
two-time NCAA finalist champ for the Nittany Lions?
Was that the plan, or is this out of nowhere?**

JOSH BARR: I think coming into college, my plan, my
personal plan was probably 184. But when I met Jesus, it
turned into Jesus's plan for me. And I know you guys are
probably sick and tired of hearing it, but that's the truth.

When I really gave my life to Jesus, and Carter Starocci
said he was coming back, I said, you know what, I'm going
to just try to it. And I went up. And the Lord's faithful.
Whether I went up and didn't make the starting lineup or I
went up and I've had the success that I've had, the Lord's
faithful either way.

So it was His plan. And back to high school I would have
told you that this was probably the farthest thing from the
truth if you would have told me this was what would have

happened. But ever since I met Jesus, it all makes sense because I see miracles happen that are way greater than this kind of stuff.

Q. You said you were grateful to wrestle in last year's final because of that injury at Big Tens. How much motivation did you have to make the improvements you needed to take the final step up to the podium?

JOSH BARR: I was motivated. I think last year being really grateful to be there and ended up taking second, whatever, I was grateful for that. Grateful for this year. And it's not even so much, like I've mentioned, improving on results or improving.

And awards, finishes, whatever it is, it's improving myself from match to match. Just doing the best I can to serve the Lord.

That's the stuff that I'm focused on, truly. I'm not motivated to be an NCAA champion. I'm really not. I'm motivated to serve Jesus to be the best I can be every day in all that I do. I got into hunting this last year or, so with hunting, fishing, wrestling, being a good boyfriend to my girlfriend, being a good son to my parents, being a good big brother to my little brother, whatever it is, I'm motivated to do that stuff to the best of my ability. Wrestling, the same thing, but it's not about the finish, it's not about first, second, third, whatever, it's about just being the best I can be.

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