

2026 NCAA Wrestling Championship

Saturday, March 21, 2026

Cleveland, Ohio, USA

Rocket Arena

Luke Lilledahl

Cael Sanderson

Finals Media Conference



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Luke Lilledahl (Penn State) d. Marc-Anthony McGowan (Princeton), 2-1

Q. I know you don't dwell on records or anything, but third year in a row you've established the team scoring record. And while you don't focus on that, the improvement from year to year seems to be a reflection of what you do focus on as improvements. Can you talk about the improvement?

CAEL SANDERSON: Yeah, I think this was an incredible year. Obviously our heart and minds with kids who didn't reach their goals, and we're here thinking about hey what can we do better, we've got to do this better. We've got a lot on our minds now.

Happy for the team. Just really an incredible group of guys, outstanding year. Our staff is, they're all unicorns, really, up and down the lineup -- director of ops, our general manager -- every one of them, our trainer, obviously Cody and Casey and Nick Lee and the whole crew. We're very blessed. Very grateful.

Q. Can you just tell me, some of the words of advice you give to guys who fall short, like Marcus, PJ and Van Ness? What are some advice you give to those guys?

CAEL SANDERSON: I don't know. I mean, each kid, it's just a process. And sometimes the best thing that can happen to you is you've got to learn, whether you win or lose, obviously, but tough losses can change a career for the better and help you make those changes that will help you reach your ultimate goal at the highest level.

Losing is no fun. We hate it. It stinks. And don't wish it on anybody. But it's part of life. You just keep fighting, keep getting back up, and things will work out.

Q. Pivot away from wrestling, could you talk about Cael's Cookies, the inspiration behind that and your venture there?

CAEL SANDERSON: I'm sure the people running it would love me to talk about the cookies, but, yeah, just something that we started probably 20 years ago. Kind of died and came back. So just giving it a run. It's fun.

Love the products. It was ahead of its game. So it failed a few times. But it's good stuff. So we like them. I like them. So we put the effort into bringing them back.

Q. Can you just speak to consistency and the program, fifth national title in a row. Just so much consistency in your approach. I know you guys are big on certainly leadership and when you're working with your athletes --

CAEL SANDERSON: 100 percent. I mean, we work every day. We love what we do. We love each other, our staff. That's what, the kids in the program and the staff we work with, that's what it's all about.

Seeing those guys every day is what motivates me and just continuing to learn and grow.

We're a blessed program. We follow the rules. There's not a lot of that going on right now. And that's one of the reasons we can sleep when the wind blows. We train hard and do the right things to the best of our ability and things will work out.

Q. Luke Lilledahl, how does it feel to become a national champion your first time?

LUKE LILLED AHL: It feels amazing. Just kind of solidifies that I've been doing everything right and having trust in my coaches and trust in my training. And hopefully this is just a stepping stone to what I'm going to do in the future.

At the same time, it's nice to win, but I'm already thinking about freestyle. I'm thinking about next year.

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Q. Luke, the second match in the row against him. He's shown not a lot of interest in carrying the action. Could you describe what it takes to maintain the discipline and the patience to not overextend yourself and hook yourself up (indiscernible) and try to score?

LUKE LILLED AHL: Yeah, I think just staying patient has been a big thing for me this year. Not getting flustered by guys that are trying to keep the exchanges low and keep the scoring low.

So just having the ability to stay patient and stay poised in those tight matches is a big skill. And I think I've done a better job of that this year than last year. So that was just one of the things that, kind of going into this year, I knew I was going to have to maybe sharpen a bit, and I did that.

Q. Cael, can you just talk about, you've seen a lot of national champions come through the program. What's it like watching one of your athletes win their first national championship?

CAEL SANDERSON: It's awesome. I actually like seeing their parents, too, and I can see them in the back right now. It's such a cool thing.

I mean, I have a son that wrestles. And every one of these kids feels like they're your own son. So when you see them be successful, it's really awesome.

Obviously when they aren't as successful, it hurts a lot. But, yeah, seeing them win a national championship is really, really cool.

Q. You put up 181.5 team points, continued to score. Luke, obviously you were a part of that as well. What makes your guys so consistent when it comes to bonus points?

CAEL SANDERSON: I mean, we just -- our guys move forward. You watch the matches and our guys are moving forward the whole time. If they had a push-out rule, that would be great for our program. I hope they do.

I was against that for all these years, but it's probably something to -- because it's just really hard to call stalling. Refs, obviously don't want to call stalling even when they are stalling.

But, yeah, our guys just they look to score points. So they score points. It's really that simple. Yeah, a lot of consistency. These guys are just tough, good kids, work hard. That's what I talked about a little bit earlier.

Q. Luke, can you talk about, you're a very aggressive

wrestler, very quick from neutral and very freestyle-savvy, too, your skill set. Really good for that. Can you just talk about your approach, your offensive style? And Penn State as a whole has that mentality. What is that mentality?

LUKE LILLED AHL: I think our mentality is just keep scoring points, like Coach Cael said. We train in the room every day to go out and have these opportunities, so why not enjoy it?

I feel like a lot of guys might wrestle kind of uptight and that's maybe why the exchanges are low because guys are afraid to make mistakes and afraid to score points. You live by the sword, you die by the sword. If you keep your matches close all the time, it's eventually going to catch up to you.

So this year, for me, it was -- obviously I wanted to win the nationals, but I wanted to put a stamp on that 125 is my weight class for the next two years. And I feel like I've done that. So next year, it's just about going out and kind of widening the gap against these guys that are keeping it close.

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