

University of Iowa Wrestling Media Conference

Wednesday, October 29, 2025

Iowa City, Iowa, USA

Coach Tom Brands

Men's Wrestling Press Conference



with fans and donors.

So that's my opening statement.

TOM BRANDS: I think this comes down to a lot of questions and speculation. We're coming down to the season where those questions and speculation will be answered about our lineup. We have a roster of 32 or whatever it is, and then all summer and fall have been wondering what our lineup is going to look like.

So we're there. We're here. Thursday is tomorrow, and one week from tomorrow, we start.

You can throw a lot of names in 10 weight classes. We have those freshman rules where -- Angelo Ferrari is a veteran because of the rules. We're going to use freshmen and so on and so forth.

Then the other part of it is the schedule. The schedule, we always -- I would like someone to do a study on who has the toughest schedule, RPI, whatever the metrics are, use some NFL or Major League Baseball metric and figure it out, because every year we do, and then this year we're going to the National Duals.

I'm not tooting our own horn because we do have the toughest schedule every year, but what I am saying is that there's been a lot of conversation around those National Duals, and why would you do that when you already are wrestling Penn State, from the Big Ten, Oklahoma State every year. Every year we're wrestling them.

National Duals, they play dirty. The money behind it flew to Iowa City. Smart guy, awesome, and there is a million-dollar purse, and it keeps getting higher, and then the profits are going to be put back into the purse for next year. That's unprecedented in the sport of wrestling. A million dollar purse that's going to get bigger every year if they make money?

This guy is a smart guy. He's selling the rights. He's selling it to ESPN. He's going to sell a lot of hot dogs down there in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Next year the purse could be \$1.5. It's \$200,000 to win.

Those are the two things -- it's like constant conversation

Q. From an outside perspective, it seems like the past 12 months were kind of a roller coaster for Gabe Arnold. From your perspective, what was it like to watch him and coach him for that period of time, and what do you want to see from him this season so that he can be the best version of himself both on and off the mat?

TOM BRANDS: Gabe Arnold is a competitor. He wants to win. He takes losing very hard. In the off season, he had to deal with a season that he did not want to necessarily come to terms with.

We all go through that. He left the team. But I don't even think he officially left the team because I don't think the paperwork was done by the time he came back. So whether he left the team or not, the love is still there for him.

What have we done in the off season? What has he done? You have to be steady, steadier, and it's not going to be easy. But the formula is simple. You have to take care of yourself. You have to be accountable. You have to address the things that you have to address in a mature fashion.

We're going to need Gabe Arnold. We're going to need him. We're going to need 32 out of 32 on that roster. We're going to need them all.

We have a roster that got shaved down, and we're going to need them all. And Gabe Arnold, essential.

Q. You talked about using the five days with your true freshmen. What have you seen from that incoming class that makes you already know that you want to use those guys this year?

TOM BRANDS: Serious about the sport, wanted to move here before they got out of high school, which you can't do that, love Iowa City, love the University of Iowa, love their teammates, loved their experience when they were being recruited.

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Then they get here, and a lot of times that stuff wears off. It hasn't worn off, a couple of those guys, and that's important. They know that they have work to do, and they come to the practices. They come to their workouts focused, and they're getting better every day.

Q. The final ride for Drake Ayala. What have you liked so much about --

TOM BRANDS: No-Brake Drake from Dirty Dodge. I've been waiting for his name to come up. No-Brake Drake Ayala from Dirty Dodge.

Q. What have you liked about his journey from the time he got here to where he is now?

TOM BRANDS: He's always been serious about the sport of wrestling. He's always wanted to win. He was a winner coming in. He was a winner when he got here. He's still a winner.

I did an interview with Andy Hamilton on Flowrestling a little while ago. We talked about Drake Ayala. He's been close twice. It sucks the first time. It really sucks the second time.

He's addressing the things that he needs to address in a mature, professional way, and you can't say anything better about how he has taken care of himself, No. 1, and No. 1 right alongside that, making sure that he's holding those around him accountable as well.

There's not a lot of wiggle room with him as a leader. You don't always have that in your roster. You don't always have that. What I mean by wiggle room is he's going to pinch you if you're not doing what you need to be doing, so an extension of the coaching staff.

Very mature. I can't say enough good about him. We have to win, though. We have to win. Is that too much pressure? We have to win.

Q. That leadership, is that something that's developed, or is that something you've talked to him about?

TOM BRANDS: I think it's something that's innate in him. He's a winner coming into this program. He was a winner in Dirty Dodge. He's been a winner his whole life, how he was raised. He's mature. That's something that he's grown, of course, but he's always been -- he's our best recruiter. He's been our best recruiter since the day he walked on campus.

I'll say it; there's been violations of programs trying to pull him away, and he's stood strong and he's stood fast

through it all.

Q. There's a lot of parallels between him and Cory Clark's career here at Iowa. I'm wondering, is that a name you bring up to him at all coming into this senior season hoping to get over the hump as a senior?

TOM BRANDS: Yeah. Parallels, mostly Iowa born and bred, weight class. Little bit different in the history of what they've gone through, the adversity stuff, how close they were as underclassmen.

There are a lot of similarities there, but they are two different people, as well. Drake Ayala and Cory Clark are both on the extreme end of being a competitor. Cory Clark was a quirky guy, one of my favorites of all time. Drake Ayala, he's got his s*** together, academically, accountability-wise, leadership-wise. Cory Clark was a quirky, fun guy. But that's where they're a little bit different there.

Q. Two guys in Nasir Bailey and Jordan Williams come in together from Little Rock. What have you liked about those guys? It seems like they are close friends from what we've seen on social media from those two, and what are they about?

TOM BRANDS: Anytime you go to the portal, there's a reason why you do it, and when you end up with guys from the portal, you feel good about it and there's an instant excitement. I also alluded to this a couple weeks ago or a week ago where it has to be exciting every day and you have to come to work every day.

Why did you come to the University of Iowa? Why did you leave your previous institution? So it can never be old hat here. It can never be old hat. You can never lose the excitement of why you left where you left to come here, to WrestleTown USA. Why did you do that? Remind yourself every day and go to work in that fashion every day.

Nasir Bailey is a serious guy, and he does that. And Jordan Williams, need him to keep continuing to do that. We need him to keep continuing to do that. Great additions to our program.

Q. What are your thoughts on the transfer portal right now at this stage?

TOM BRANDS: We're going to recruit the transfer portal. Those rules are going to be here, we're going to recruit the transfer portal.

Q. What have you seen with Massoma coming from Wartburg? How have his skills as a national champion

at Division III translated in practice so far and what are you expecting from him this season?

TOM BRANDS: Good question, translating skills. This is big boy now. I'm not saying that his accomplishments are little boy, but he has, as you alluded to, a skill level. He's tremendously athletic. He's tremendously gifted in a lot of things that he does very, very well on the mat.

I think that he knows that he has to up it. We're going to need him, and he has the ability. We love that addition. We love it. He's also a portal get.

Q. Just to follow up on Jordan, he had an off-the-mat incident in June. Is he going to have to miss any time for that, or is that just something you guys have handled internally?

TOM BRANDS: I'm not going to answer that; it has been put to rest a long time ago. Our administration and myself talk every day about this program. It's no different than the men's basketball coach, the women's basketball coach, Kirk Ferentz. It's no different than how Rick Heller runs his program. We are in direct communication with our fourth-floor administration. That was handled and put to rest a long time ago. You besmirched his name, and I'm going to defend him.

Q. After a strong off-season of development, what's your message to the team and to the fan base as the season begins?

TOM BRANDS: I mean, I've been talking for however many minutes now, and we are excited. There's a lot of dialogue about who's going to be at what weight, and it is upon us. The time is upon us. I'm as excited as anybody to see who's going to grab the spot and run with it. That's the message.

Then our schedule. Why would you go to the National Duals when you wrestle Penn State, Oklahoma State and you go through the Big Ten every year? Why would you do that? You wrestle Iowa State every year; why would you do that?

Well, there's a million dollar purse, and it's unprecedented in wrestling. So we added to already the toughest schedule in college Division I wrestling.

If I had to have an opinion on that, I would say we've got to find a better time probably for it. Not this year but in the future. But that's a repeat of my opening statement. So that's my message.

The questions that I've been getting from casual fans,

enemy fans, top committed donors are all about who's going to be your 25-pounder, who's going to be at 41. We're going to find out really quick; how's that?

Q. How do you prepare a guy like Drake who has been to two national finals? Does anything change in those off seasons? What gets tweaked for a guy like that to kind of get over the hump?

TOM BRANDS: You address the things that he's fallen short in in a very serious manner and in a very consistent manner. He's done that. He's doing that. He will continue to do that.

Q. As a brother yourself, what do you make of the Voinovich brothers competing at 149?

TOM BRANDS: I would say they're at different weights. One will be at 57. Certification-wise that may -- whatever. But they remind me of -- as you've said, the brother thing. They like to -- they're like, (in play-fighting tone) "yah, yah," like to poke each other in the eye and give a little jab here. They're brothers.

Sometimes we've got to separate them, in a healthy way. They live together, so -- they're awesome, though.

Q. Patrick Kennedy has made some big strides last season. How has he built on that coming into this year?

TOM BRANDS: Patrick -- like Kueter hasn't been mentioned, Patrick Kennedy hasn't been mentioned, Angelo Ferrari. These guys are serious about winning in the sport of wrestling. They're serious about the contributions that they're going to make to a team.

I know that this is an individual sport, and I know the individual accolades are most important. That's how you put a good team on the mat. But I also know that these guys are very, very invested in each other or throughout the roster.

Caliendo hasn't been mentioned. We talked a lot about Drake Ayala. We mentioned Bailey. But those other three All-Americans, Caliendo, Kueter and Kennedy, they're the same. They're our best recruiters. They're the best teammates. They're bringing -- Angelo Ferrari, he's bringing guys along. They spend time after workout with younger guys and mentor them the right way.

We have great character on this team. They're pretty doggone good students, too.

We have a good thing going. But you can have great

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character and be a good student but you still have to win, and that's the simple part. It's not easy to do, but you have to win. It's freaking easy, man. Not easy, but it's simple. The formula is simple. W-i-n, win.

Q. With a guy like Dean, he wrestles with a lot of moxie or swagger or passion. Is that something you've seen from him?

TOM BRANDS: Dean Peterson, absolutely. Good observation. I said in the Flowrestling interview, he intrigues me. Andy Hamilton wanted to know what I mean by that, and I just mean that he intrigues me.

I thought maybe you might have said Endene. Endene also intrigues me. Super, super potential. We're going to need both those guys.

Thank you. Enjoy our roster. Thank you.

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