

NCAA Wrestling Championship

Saturday, March 23, 2019

Mekhi Lewis

Press Conference

165 pounds

THE MODERATOR: Mekhi Lewis, you're a national champion. What does that mean to you to be a national champion?

MEKHI LEWIS: It means a lot. I always wanted to be a national champ. So to have this opportunity and go out there and wrestle and try to become one, I'm just so grateful for it.

Q. Just talk about -- I believe the first national champion in Virginia Tech history. What does that mean to you to put the program on the national stage like that?

MEKHI LEWIS: It means a lot, because Virginia Tech wrestling has been really good. It's just that we never really had good Finals, good end results. So to be the first one is really special. It means a lot to me. Just so happy that I'm a part of the program.

Q. Last summer you won the Junior Worlds in freestyle. Will you jump right into freestyle this spring? And would you take the challenge of wrestling the No. 1 guy up in Madison Square Garden at the Beat the Streets event?

MEKHI LEWIS: That is a good question. I do not know the answer to that. Maybe. I don't know.

Q. [Inaudible]?

MEKHI LEWIS: Not yet. Almost. Almost there.

Q. When you did wrestle the Junior Worlds, you had not a lot of freestyle-level competition at that level, is that correct? And how were you introduced to it? Did the coaches talk you into doing that? I mean, are you just taking on things without even worrying about them?

MEKHI LEWIS: So when I redshirted last year, I just remember I think it was Robie, our head coach, told me I was going to do freestyle. I was like, I don't know about it. He said just try it out.

So I was just in practice trying it out. He was teaching me a lot. Didn't do so good my first tournament. So I was pretty upset. But something motivated me, so I continued to do it for some reason even though I didn't



really like it.

And after I won trials, that's when it was, like, more of, like, it's not that I don't -- I hate freestyle, it's just that some days I really don't want to do it. Other days I like it. I could wrestle it. So just that.

Q. The cradle at the start of the second period, did you see something on film and plan that, or did you just feel it and go for it?

MEKHI LEWIS: I just felt -- this tournament that's what I was looking for against all my opponents. The first opponent, I felt it was Marinelli, and I know Joseph did the same kind of stand-up as him. And as soon as I felt that I was getting it locked up and he was trying to fight out of it sort of, I just went with it. It was, like, a natural feeling, just natural.

Q. At one point there was a sequence where you had your leg in it and it looked like he was about to get a takedown, but you guys went out of bounds, it looked like you shook your head at him in a way. Just wanted to ask about that. And were you ever worried about giving up the takedown, or were you always confident in that defense?

MEKHI LEWIS: I just shook my head because, like, that's what was happening this whole tournament, people was getting on my legs deep. And I just said, no. I just remembered in my mind I was, like, I'm just going to keep fighting, fight, work every position, fight it off.

So basically that's where the shake-my-head came from. It wasn't to insult him or anything, nothing like that.

Q. You came in as an 8 seed. You beat the 1, 2 and 4 seeds. Did you feel like an underdog or did you think those were all your matches to win?

MEKHI LEWIS: Well, everybody, other than my teammate's, family and coaches and fans, thought I was the underdog. I didn't think I was the underdog. I just thought people didn't get the chance to see me wrestle at a big stage, like, folkstyle, because they only saw freestyle. And I just felt like I was like I was prepared and ready to win a national title. So I felt equal to everybody I wrestled.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

