

Wrestling: Mendez Wins National Championship, Buckeyes Finish Eighth



Jesse Mendez came out on top of his rubber match with Penn State's Beau Bartlett to win the first national championship for Ohio State since 2018.

Rocco Welsh finished as a runner up at 174 pounds as a true freshman losing to Penn State's Carter Starocci 2-0 while Nick Feldman finished in fifth place at heavyweight.

Mendez faced off against No. 2 Bartlett for the third time this season. He lost the first match at Penn State in the regular season in sudden victory, but was able to come back and beat Bartlett in the Big Ten Championship, helping him get the No.1 seed in the national tournament.

The first period of the match was spent with both wrestlers feeling each other out, not taking the usual aggressive approach they usually have, and it finished scoreless.

Mendez started the second period on bottom and escaped in seven seconds. There was more action in the period with Bartlett getting to Mendez' leg late in the period and flipping him to the mat, but he was able to keep moving and get ahold of Bartlett's leg to avoid the takedown. Mendez went into the third period with a 1-0 lead.

Bartlett was on bottom to begin the third period, but Mendez was able to stay on top for 37 seconds before the Nittany Lion escaped to tie the match at one.

Bartlett was able to get to both of Mendez' legs with 20 seconds left in the third period, but Mendez was able to roll after flipping to the mat and take control of Bartlett, taking his back to the mat to score a takedown for three points and win the national championship.

"That's one of those spots where you just have to go," Mendez said. "There's no stopping in wrestling. There's no being like, 'Oh s— I'm about to lose the national finals.' You keep wrestling and you go get it."

Welsh went against No. 1 Starocci, who took two medical forfeits in the Big Ten tournament due to a leg injury he suffered in Penn State's final regular season dual against Edinboro.

Starocci was very aggressive early on, but nothing came of it with Welsh defending well, not allowing

the Nittany Lion to land his attacks at his legs, though it did result in two stalling calls against Welsh which awarded a point to Starocci, who led 1-0 through the first period.

Starocci chose to start the second period on bottom and after the second break of the match to clean the blood off of Welsh's face, Starocci escaped to give himself a two-point lead forcing Welsh to get a little more aggressive than he had been the rest of the tournament, but couldn't score the rest of the period.

Welsh chose neutral to start the third period and gained control of the center of the mat, but couldn't score and Starocci won his fourth straight NCAA Championship.

Feldman started the day with a match against No. 3 Wyatt Hendrickson from Air Force with a chance to get into the third-place bout, but he ended up losing 14-5 and was set to fight for fifth.

That match was against Cohlton Schultz from Arizona State, the No. 4 seed at heavyweight, and he landed a takedown in the first period with nearfall points and took a 7-0 lead into the second.

Schultz went neutral to begin and was able to manage two points in the period, but Feldman held on and was able to take an 11-4 win.