

University of Iowa Media Conference

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Tom Brands



Q. How did you guys come up with the outdoor match, who got that going?

TOM BRANDS: It was very much a team effort with administration, and it was our brainchild, but we're not the originators. I mean, people have been wrestling outside since the beginning of time, and just so happens it's the first time it's been done in Division I. It's a big deal because it's about two storied programs and a rivalry that continues, and these rivalries are getting tougher to schedule just because of the Big Ten getting bigger, and so that's how it came about.

Q. You have a bunch of heavyweights; are you happy with them so far?

TOM BRANDS: Sam Stoll is doing a good job. He's going to have a learning curve. The biggest thing that he has to realize is that it is about being at your best every time out, and if he can do that, he has a chance to be a real good heavyweight.

He's got some pretty good credentials from high school to back it up, and he certainly also has some good credentials internationally at the senior level in Greco-Roman, and he's just got to do things that are consistent with what got him to those standards, but now it's got to carry over to collegiate wrestling.

Q. Where did he make the most progress in his redshirt season?

TOM BRANDS: Maturity; realizing what it takes more than anything. That's what we like to see, too. You're going to get better with your skills. You're going to get better at the things that you do, but it's about realizing that it's time to grow up and things aren't going to be as easy as they used to be, and he's realized that. He's putting together some good workouts now and it's not just the last week or so but over the summer, and even last year he did a good job. It's just a matter of every day getting better and maturing.

Q. What do you see in your leaders this year? You've got your seniors and upperclassmen?

TOM BRANDS: That's a good question because one of the things I wanted to address -- you talk about Nathan Burak, he's a senior; Brody Grothus is a senior, as well. Those two guys represent us very well. But Nathan Burak is a two-time All-American. He's a senior; he's a 3.8 student. He's everything you want your program to

be looked upon as. A lot of times he's not maybe given enough attention, not that he's seeking the attention anyway, but when you talk about leadership, you talk about an example of what to look for in a student athlete, he's a wrestler that embodies that and represents our program very well.

And then the other All-Americans, Gilman and Clark and Sorensen, but also you've got Meyer and Sam Brooks who are very capable. I mentioned Brody Grothus. We've got some young guys that can do a good job of leadership, as well, but they've got to develop a platform for leadership. People don't tend to listen to somebody who's got a goose egg under the W column. They listen to people that got a lot of notches on their belt, so to speak, or on their weapon, in the W column, so to speak.

Q. Talk about the Big Ten this year; how do you feel you guys are sitting, and Ohio State, Penn State?

TOM BRANDS: We're in the conversation, and I don't know really where we're ranked in specific rankings. I know we're in the three, four range nationally, and three out of the four are Big Ten schools.

And actually probably four out of the five, I mean, with Michigan, Iowa, Penn State and Ohio State. So nothing has changed. We're after winning a national title, and we're after winning individual titles, and those goes have been good in the past, and the same usual suspects are good this year, as well. Virginia Tech, they have a team that they're proud of, so there's a top six or seven that are real relevant in the landscape. We've got to be ready every time out.

Q. How do you see things developing at 141?

TOM BRANDS: We're going to wrestle those guys this weekend, and we're looking for someone to emerge, and this guy right here that you're looking at has been looking for someone to emerge throughout the fall. That hasn't really happened, and we need someone -- and we'll see. When the lights are on, maybe guys are better in the competition arena. Last year I talked about Topher Carton last year, talked about how he's matured and come around, and he really has had some opportunities to do very well, and he's been slowed a little bit here and there for other reasons, injuries and other reasons, and he needs to assert himself if he's going to be the guy. The same with

Logan Ryan. I'll tell you what, we've got a true freshman in there, Vince Turk, who's relevant in the conversation, as well. So all three of those guys will be competing this weekend, and we'll see how it shakes out, and that will be the determining factor. Not the sole factor, but that'll be something we look at for who's going to be on the mat in Kinnick.

Q. Is it the same kind of deal at 157 and 165?

TOM BRANDS: A little bit. Maybe not so much competition right now but maybe where you have a couple names there that can do a good job for us. When I say I feel good about our guys, I mean, those guys are -- those weight classes are -- I feel good about them, but you want someone to emerge and be the world beater. We like world beaters, and we have some ways to go before those guys prove that they're world beaters. They all want to be, but you know, you mentioned those are the three weight classes that -- we've got to have some firepower out of those three weight classes.

Q. Where do you see Brody fitting into the lineup?

TOM BRANDS: Right now he's still coming back from a repair he had done, and he's doing a good job. He's getting more and more on the mat. He's been on the mat for a couple weeks now. Every day it's more and more. He wants to push the envelope. We have a great medical staff with Jesse Donnenwerth and our team doctors that are making sure we do the right thing. You have a guy right here that has a pretty good pulse on what's going on, and we're not going to let him have free reign, but that's a good sign. I mean, any time a guy wants to push the envelope, we're fine with that, but we're going to be smart there and patient, because we want to make sure that we don't go backwards, and he hasn't gone backwards at all. And a lot of times when you have a rehab situation where guys are going forward, forward, forward, forward, and are patient, that's when you have the best chance to keep that repair strong, not only for their season or their career but for their entire life, and that's what we're looking for. We're looking out for his best interest for our team, for the weight class that he's going to represent, and then also for his longevity with that joint.

So there's a lot there, but I like that he's got the bit in his mouth and he's pulling on those reins. I like that.

Q. What weight class is that?

TOM BRANDS: You tell me. You follow the sport very well. Andy Hamilton, I'll let everybody know that you asked that question, but you tell me what weight class. He's good enough to go 41, 49, 57. So we have a lot of options there, and we'll see how things shake out as we get forward and he gets closer to when he's going to step on the mat. That time frame is late December, early January. So that's when that stuff will all -- those

puzzles, I guess, those puzzle pieces will kind of start falling together there. Is that a fair answer for you, my man?

Q. Sorensen had a nice freshman year. What does he need to do to step up to the next level?

TOM BRANDS: He's got to realize that he's got some pretty high-powered, high-potent offense, and he's got to go-go-go and not just go...go...go. It's got to be go-go-go, and in a smart way, and I think he can do that. He's made progress, as well. But that last match that he wrestled collegiately against Tsirtsis was something where he was waiting to trick the guy, and the first time is when you trick a guy. Tsirtsis got in him on deep and then he tried to do a second move, and Sorensen tried to neck wrench him, and then he tried it actually two other times, and the third time Tsirtsis ended up taking him down. Those are things that you can't wait for. At some point you've got to assert yourself and go to your offense and put the guy down hard and plant him and be on reaction time so the referee is giving the two points, and we've learned from that because it's been discussed and shown, and it's time to move on from a shortcut-type mentality, and that's as a team.

Sorensen is not a shortcut-type guy, but for whatever reason in that match, he was looking for something where it was a trick, and those tricks happen in the blink of an eye. They don't happen over and over and over and over again, especially against good wrestlers.

So you've got to put the exclamation mark on that situation there, and then we're fine; neck wrench him and pin him. But if it doesn't work, then we need to be running around behind guys and front headlock offense situations, those types of things. I'm getting pretty specific there, but I think you get what I'm saying.

Q. Last year you kind of singled out Topher Carton as a guy that you said was most improved. Who would you say kind of is that this year?

TOM BRANDS: Here's the thing: We have a lot of guys that are improved right now. I don't really put anybody in that category. He was catching my eye through the summer a little bit, and there's a lot of guys that have caught my eye. Our freshmen that we're going to have to rely on, Burke Paddock and Sam Stoll and other guys that want their name out there. Tagen Lambotte, he wants to be relevant at 149 or 157 pounds. That's his weight class category. But they've improved, but how much and at what -- I guess the thing is at what point is your improvement judged by the hard and correct rule that you're kicking people's butt. That's what's important to the fans in this program, is that our guys represent the program in a good way and they're good students, but also that they're winning matches and big matches and consistently and asserting themselves as the best in the country and in the world.

Q. Alex Meyer had some big wins stepping into this spot once every four or five meets last season.

What kind of steps has he taken to consistently put up wins like that as a starter this year?

TOM BRANDS: Alex Meyer is a name that makes me smile. He is everything from a work ethic point of view in everything that he does. He's grown up tremendously since his first couple months here, and the other thing is that he's a leader in that room from a just put your head down and go to work example.

The humor that comes out of him, the conversations that you have with him, the sarcastic humor, it's quiet humor, and those are the types of things, the qualities in him that make me smile.

Now let's talk about the rest, the wins that you talked about that were very relevant. He's got the motor on him. He's got the type of attitude where it's kind of like anyone, any time, anywhere, and those big wins aren't by accident or aren't because he ambushed guys because they weren't ready for him. He's been relevant for the last couple of years sitting behind Evans, and those wins were earned. They weren't ambushes, like I said, and that's what I like about him. I like his durability. I like his lack of complaining. I like his tough-guy mentality, and he's always been a tough guy. He's a good example for some freshmen that maybe have some owees that think it's the end of the world where you have a guy like Alex Meyer who deals with that stuff every day and just puts his head down and goes forward one step at a time. Love him, absolutely love him.

Q. What have you seen out of Cory Clark this off season?

TOM BRANDS: The kid can wrestle. We have a lot of personalities on this team that I'm very fond of. I mentioned Burak and Gilman. Every time you see them, they make you feel good that they're on your side. I wouldn't want to compete against Thomas Gilman or Cory Clark or any of those guys, Sorensen, so it's good to have the names that I mentioned on our team. That's good. And Cory Clark has got a lot of firepower. He's one of these guys that it's never good enough, not to the point where he derails himself or obsesses over something that isn't important, but to the point where everything is important and he wants to be perfect every time out.

I think we talked about it last year and Terry mentioned it right after his match with Brewer in the national finals, how he was dissecting that match immediately, and we talk about owning it a lot in this program. We talk about no excuses, and the thing about Cory Clark is, and really all of our guys that I've mentioned, they own

it. There's really no excuses, and that's why they get better every day.

What have I seen out of him? I've seen progress over the summer. I've seen a guy that's realizing that school is more and more important. He's going to class on a more consistent basis without having to be reminded. Those are good things. He's becoming a man. He's got two years left, and he's got a chance to stamp himself as one of the best in the program, and based on his ability to wrestle in an exciting fashion and based on his credentials thus far.

Q. I know it's down the line, but having the Big Ten Championship in Iowa City has got to be -- Carver usually rocks --

TOM BRANDS: Our schedule is good with Kinnick and then Minnesota coming to town, and Oklahoma State is part of the Kinnick Duel, and we go to Iowa State, and we've got South Dakota State. That's a big match for a lot of reasons. Then you get into the Midlands, and then post-Christmas you've got the Big Tens in Iowa City, and that's a big deal. We've got to be at our best every time out, but there's no better place to win than Iowa City, and there's no better time to win now, so in March, whatever weekend that is, there will be no better time and place to give yourself an individual championship.

We've got the Olympic trials in April, too. That's not really relevant in this press conference, but a lot of reasons to be excited about Iowa City and wrestling.

Q. Any chance National Duals comes to Iowa City again?

TOM BRANDS: Yeah, it's coming. It's coming to Iowa City. There will be a dual meet here. It's just a matter of how important that dual will be, and that will be determined by how well we do our job until that February 21 date or whatever it is.

Q. You want to talk about Travis Rutt and Dan Dennis coming back into the room?

TOM BRANDS: Dan Dennis isn't in a coaching capacity, he's in a Hawkeye Wrestling Club capacity, but he impacts our guys every day by rubbing elbows with them and battling them, and iron sharpens iron. That's a timeless biblical principle. We love it that he's back, Dan Dennis.

Travis Rutt, we started that out as kind of a trial thing. You never know when you don't know somebody, but he has -- you know what, he reminds me of a coach and he's a strength coach, but he reminds me of a coach that isn't satisfied with something that's on paper over a period of time. A lot of times you pencil something in and you walk away and you leave it, and

that's the one thing I learned about Gable is that you work every day very hard at what's important in your life, and what's important in our lives is wrestling, so we're not just going to lay a schedule out from October 10 until the national tournament and then not deviate from it. You work on it every day, and Travis Rutt, I see that in his going about his strength training, and he's had to depart maybe from some of the things that his education and his expertise -- maybe three months ago he would have not departed from, and the reason why is because he's fully invested that this is about -- and you can ask him when you go downstairs, but this is about guys' performance on the mat, and that's what I love about him. This isn't about a strength coach just going in and checking the box that we're getting these guys bigger, stronger and faster. This is about a mentality that jives and coincides with the philosophy of the program, and that is that you are at your best every time when you step on that mat. So he's really done a good job of shifting things around and laying out a lot of different what I would say phases. So there's an early-season phase, and then right away we hit the ground, and then we started getting into our team conditioning, so we had to adjust some things there, and then we start getting October 10th comes around, now we're on the mat, he adjusted some things there. Now we're getting closer to competition. He's adjusted some things there. And it's always ahead of time.

So what am I saying? I'm singing his praises. We're very happy with our entire Hawkeye Resident Club. We're very happy with our entire staff.