

# University of Iowa Wrestling Media Conference

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## Coach Tom Brands

### Men's Wrestling Press Conference



TOM BRANDS: It's great to see awesome people here, that's for sure. Every year it's a big reunion here for Media Day. I don't really have an opening statement.

I know for the first time in my coaching career and even dating back to when I was an assistant with Gable and Jim Zalesky, that last season, the path and things that happened there were unfortunate. We have to put our best team on the mat.

We have to be able to put our best wrestlers on the mat. If we can do that, we like where we're at.

**Q. Can I just ask you about Spencer Lee, and how is he? But in addition to that, do you have a word or a phrase to describe his journey at Iowa?**

TOM BRANDS: He's resilient and he is incredibly focused on the next thing to get himself on the mat. He's never wavered from that mission. That's a great testament. And you can say great, incredible, tremendous. You can say all those adjectives over and over and over again. The bottom line about him is he's never wavered in his quest to be the best wrestler on the planet, and that's still the case.

It's unique, because a lot of civilians don't understand like that quest, and he's never wavered from it.

What I mean by that is there's so much turmoil and there's so much adversity that you have to overcome, and then he overcomes it just with his frame of mind, his mindset and how he marches.

One of the first things I remember was unique about this guy was when he came to campus and we were talking about how he drives. He says, I drive really slow, and the reason why is because I don't want to get in an accident because if I get in an accident, I might get hurt and then I can't wrestle.

That's as plain as it gets right there. Wrestling is everything to this guy.

He's never wavered from his quest to be the best wrestler on the planet. What a tribute.

**Q. How did that mindset get built?**

TOM BRANDS: I think, first of all, you give credit to Larry and Kathy Lee. You know the story of his mom as a competitor. You know the story of his dad as a coach in judo. That, and then the fact that you've got to have something built into you that's just a little bit different gear.

You get asked about Spencer Lee a lot, so over six years it's like, what can you say that's unique or whatever, and then you come up with something maybe that's a little bit not redundant, and then like I've said it three or four times in the last week. I was speaking across town today; I was in Davenport two or three weeks ago.

The thing is he's got this little gear in him that is just ferocious and a ferociously competitive gear.

There's probably a little bit of fear built into this guy where he doesn't want to give the naysayers any foothold. He wants to prove them wrong. You know what, for his opponents, payback is a bitch. You know what I mean? Payback is tough, because he's coming.

He's so humble, and he'll take time for autographs and conversation with all the fans.

But make no mistake about who he is as a competitor.

**Q. Were his injuries ever too bad that you were wondering whether he'd come back at all?**

TOM BRANDS: I think that's always the case, and the thing is that's his decision. What I mean by that is, the medical team is phenomenal. You can't give Robby Westermann and Jesse Donnenwerth enough credit. But at the same time, there's got to be a can-do attitude in there.

It's a testament to his upbringing. Where does that mentality come from? It starts with his parents, and then he is determined.

The thing is, it's like, is it make or break, and he's right on the cliff, and we're not there. He's going. There's



progress. He'll be on the mat.

**Q. How do you make that decision on when to insert him into the lineup?**

TOM BRANDS: I think it's like anything else with anything. Even when you make your macro schedule, when you make the University of Iowa wrestling schedule, the right blend -- the Big Ten, we don't control as much, but the right blend of competition, the right blend, the right date, and with him -- actually that's the case with any individual. It's got to be the right blend. That's a good word.

**Q. I also want to ask you about Real Woods coming here. A lot of programs are bringing in new guys. When you recruit someone, you take a long time to get to know them that well. The way the system is now, do you have time to study someone like Real when he comes in? Did you know his story before he went out, that type of thing? Or is it more of a gamble now?**

TOM BRANDS: We watched him in our wrestling room at a developmental camp, and he was the real deal. We tried to recruit him. He was going to Stanford. That's the reason why he moved from his home, if you follow that FloWrestling documentary.

Bright kid, is about all the right things, the family sacrificed and sent him to Montini Catholic in Chicago. Then Stanford drops the program.

We had a guy named Jaydin Eierman, so we're not recruiting him when they kicked out the program. Well, they reinstate the program; he stays at Stanford. Then after that year, he decides to transfer. Third time's a charm.

So we looked at him initially, he chose Stanford, and then when they dropped the program, he was in the portal, so we don't have the resources. We have Eierman coming back, and then when he decided to enter the portal again, we recruited him for the third time, or had our third opportunity.

**Q. When you identify someone in the portal, you're going to really look at somebody if you already know their story, right?**

TOM BRANDS: It's not about the portal, it's not about the story. We already did our homework with him. You obviously know the makeup and the background of these guys. It's a small world, especially the higher the level you go.

How I look at the rule, it's not whether or not I agree with

them or whether or not the portal is good or bad or do we know someone in the portal. It's the rules, and we operate in the framework of them, and that's how we did it.

With Real Woods' situation, it was a no-brainer. There were people -- when I say people, there were other programs that were after him hard.

I'm not sure, I think he was interested, but I think myself and Morningstar flew out and saw him, and it was time to be a Hawkeye, if I can speak for him. But you can ask him.

**Q. What has he added to your room in the time he's been here?**

TOM BRANDS: He is a very confident man. He marches to the beat of a little bit different drummer, which is awesome and okay with us. We love it. He has great energy.

The other thing is he's a direct guy. That's a great refreshing thing. Student-athletes have all the power nowadays, and he doesn't act like it.

So as a transfer especially, you can come in like that, and he's not like that. He wants to win, and that's a broad definition, winning. That's team and himself.

He wants to develop and get better -- he has his eye on the future. That's what he's about. He's about all the same things that we're about.

**Q. What does he do successfully or what makes him a successful wrestler?**

TOM BRANDS: He can wrestle top, bottom and neutral. He's the entire package. He's probably an athletic explosive guy; you could classify him as that. But I wouldn't make the mistake of pigeonholing him as just a fast-twitch, explosive athlete because he can wrestle at a lot of different positions.

**Q. When did you realize that utilizing the transfer portal, because you guys have had some success there, would be a huge part of building the program?**

TOM BRANDS: You're asking a question about the portal again. The portal is the world we live in, and we operate in that framework. I mean, that's how we operate. When the portal wasn't there, you had to wait to get a written whatever; you can talk to them but they're not released to come to your school. So we'd talk to them and then maybe after enough gamesmanship, then they would be released to come to your school. We operated in that framework.

Here we are with the portal, and we operate in the framework of those rules.

**Q. Seven guys in the program have won three titles. No one has won four. How much of a career accomplishment or how difficult is it to actually get four?**

TOM BRANDS: I think going to four, the approach was right from the very beginning for Spencer, because he set it, and when he won his first one, I think maybe the question in the media room at the national tournament went to four, and he said, I'm after the next one, and that's been his marching orders to himself since the first one.

He's definitely wrestling for posterity, for history, but it's the next one.

**Q. Patrick Kennedy has been in the room for quite a while now. He's probably going to see more extensive time on the mat. What excites you about that and how much better has he gotten?**

TOM BRANDS: He adds to our lineup very well. You saw all of our -- all-Americans, many, many of them, graduated, and he gets his turn now. That's the awesome thing about college athletics. It's quick. You get five years to wrestle four, and then it's the next group in. That's why it's so refreshingly fun and why the fans are so engaged.

He is a fan favorite now, but to make bold predictions, which I'm not in the habit of doing, I think that the fans will gravitate toward him and his style. He's well-spoken. He's direct. But he's also a hard, hard worker, very physical wrestler, and he lives the right lifestyle. Total package.

**Q. The new facility is being built over here, will be done a year from now. Can you talk about not just the future of where your program is going to be with that coming up, but wrestling as a whole, will we see more programs doing what you're doing here with this new practice facility?**

TOM BRANDS: I don't know if our mission was to try to keep up. I know it was time, and our administration is awesome. They listened, and they listened hard, and then they were full partners.

It was a labor of love for everybody, and everybody was up for it.

Here we are. It's going up. We have to keep making progress in every other way.

It is a big deal. To me, facilities and Media Day stuff is

great fanfare. As it's going up and you see it, when we move into that facility -- the flow is going to be great. It will be the finest wrestling facility on the planet, of its kind, and we're excited about that. Right now it's just a really good conversation piece.

I'm going to tell you something. I'll throw out a shout-out to McComas-Lacina Construction, an Iowa company that won the bid. Phenomenal people.

**Q. Curious with the seniors, Max, Tony, for example, what's the key to them not getting restless and continuing to improve year after year?**

TOM BRANDS: I guess the funny thing about anything in life is if you're not the best, then you're not the best. When you're on that mission, it doesn't mean that if I don't accomplish what I'm after, there's not satisfaction. Satisfaction can come in a lot of different ways.

A carrot dangled in front of you can be a catalyst, and it can keep you going, and it's addictive. When you don't accomplish what you set out to accomplish as a competitor, either of two responses. Anything from not caring and kind of not caring to just quitting is the same. That's one response.

Then the other response is to keep fighting for what I know is going to be mine, and that quest is where the value is. That's what's most important.

Then you didn't mention Warner. You said Murin and Cassioppi. But Murin, Warner, Cassioppi, Spencer, they're seniors. So good question.

**Q. How would you assess battles at 33, 57, 74 at this point?**

TOM BRANDS: 33, three guys there. Teske, Schriever, Ybarra. No prediction.

57, I think we're in good hands with all those. It's exciting. 57, Siebrecht and we'll see what happens with Reyna and Rathjen. Joe Kelly is certified there. That's interesting and exciting.

74, you have Swafford and Brands, both Iowa products. That's exciting.

How would I assess it? It's assess it as being incredibly exciting.

**Q. This freshmen class, can you talk a little bit about the opportunity to test them in a situation not to put on a redshirt?**

TOM BRANDS: Great rule, awesome. NCAA got it right in my opinion. Again, I didn't have any say in it. It showed up in my email or whatever. Lyla Clerry communicated to me. Great rule. So we will use the rule. Love it.

**Q. Does Anthony Cassioppi still make you smile?**

TOM BRANDS: He makes me smile. He makes a lot of people smile. He came back from that tournament recently, the U-23 worlds, and knowing him, he doesn't dwell on things, but he maybe left one -- it got away from him a little bit there. The score was lopsided -- yeah, well, wrestle that 99 more times, and that's where we have to get better, because you have to be 100 for 100. Just that simple. Love him. Love our guys. Thanks, we'll see you downstairs. Appreciate it.

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