



# NCAA's 3 favorites get down to business

By Bryce Miller  
The Press-Citizen

STATE COLLEGE, Pa. — The talk is over. The analysis complete.

For contenders such as Iowa, Oklahoma State and Minnesota, the chase for college wrestling's national title now moves from the mouth to the mat.

The third-ranked Hawkeyes will try to keep alive their string of four

## College wrestling



Zalesky

consecutive titles — and seven of the last eight — today when the NCAA Championships begin at Penn State's Bryce Jordan Center.

"There's no cut-and-dried team right now going in," Iowa coach Jim Zalesky said. "Probably Minnesota and Oklahoma State are favorites seeding-wise, on paper."

"But you've got to wrestle. Seeds don't win the tournament. You've got to do it on the mat."

Outsiders could cite reasons to watch out for each of the three favorites:

■ Iowa remains the national champ until a school can pry the trophy away.

The Hawkeyes qualified nine

for the tournament, including top-ranked T.J. Williams (35-0) at 149 pounds. Six other Iowa wrestlers are ranked in the top 10.

■ Oklahoma State owns the nation's No. 1 ranking and two national title favorites in Eric Guerrero at 133 and Mark Smith at 174. Third-rated Teague Moore (125) and Guerrero are defending NCAA champions.

The two — a combined 57-0 this season — lead a group of nine Cowboy qualifiers.

■ Minnesota bumped Iowa from its 25-year perch at the top of the Big Ten March 6-7 at Ann Arbor, Mich.

The Gophers, who also qualified nine, feature four in the top

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- UI's 1st-round opponents.
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two: No. 1-ranked Chad Kraft (157) and Tim Hartung (197), along with second-ranked Brandon Eggum (184) and heavyweight Brock Lesnar.

"I don't think we really have any pressure to feel," said Minnesota coach J Robinson, a former assistant coach at Iowa. "Even though we're up there, historically we haven't been one of the Big Three or Big Four. So

we're still kind of a darkhorse.

"Wherever we finish, our fans will be happy."

One factor in the tournament could be the physical condition of Oklahoma State 157-pounder Jimmy Arias.

In the Big 12 tournament at Iowa State, Arias (18-5) sat out because of a rib injury, but was awarded an NCAA "wild card" spot from conference coaches.

Iowa's Williams said those factors get pushed aside during the national tournament.

"It's all about mental toughness right now," Williams said. "You might be sick or hurt, but you just block that stuff out."

"I feel great. I'm in my best shape ever."

## NCAA wrestling

■ **What:** NCAA Championships

■ **When:** Today through Saturday

■ **Where:** Penn State's Bryce Jordan Center in State College, Pa.

■ **TV:** A replay will be shown at 12:30 a.m. Monday morning, March 22, on ESPN2.

■ **Radio:** KCJJ (AM-1630); and KXIC (AM-800) today (10 a.m. to 1 p.m., 5-8 p.m.), Friday (10 a.m. to 1 p.m., 5-8 p.m.) and Saturday (5:30 p.m. championship round).