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## ***Bo Nickal Wins the Hodge!***

Three-time NCAA Champion wins wrestling's Heisman

**UNIVERSITY PARK, Pa.; April 1, 2019** – *(Portion of release, including quotes, courtesy Bryan Van Kley, WIN Magazine)* Penn State Nittany Lion wrestler Bo Nickal (Allen, Texas) has won the WIN Magazine/Culture House Dan Hodge Trophy, presented annually to the top collegiate wrestler in the nation by ASICS. The Hodge Trophy has been awarded since 1995. The three-time NCAA champion finished first in the voting, just ahead of teammate Jason Nolf (Yatesboro, Pa.). A Nittany Lion has now won the last three Hodge Trophy awards.

Nickal joins former Nittany Lion greats Zain Retherford and David Taylor, who each claimed two Hodge Trophy honors, and former Lion stand-out Kerry McCoy, who won the honor in 1997, as Penn State recipients. In all, Penn State now has four different individuals who have won the honor six times.

The Nittany Lion won his third NCAA championship on March 23, defeating Kollin Moore of Ohio State. The 5-1 finals victory at 197 pounds was Nickal's 30th of an undefeated senior campaign that included 18 pins, three tech falls and six major decisions.

In a year that featured four outstanding finalists for the award, known as "wrestling's Heisman Trophy," Nickal won the honor over a senior teammate Jason Nolf, also a three-time NCAA champ who had very similar stats as Nickal. The other two Hodge finalists were Rutgers' senior Anthony Ashnault and Cornell sophomore two-time champ Yianni Diakomihalis, who won NCAA championships at 149 and 141 pounds, respectively.

"It's something I've wanted since I was in high school and I first found out about the award," Nickal said. "I've tried to go out and do what the Hodge symbolizes, going for the pin and scoring as many points as I can.

"It's a validation for my hard work. I tried to make the most out of every second on the mat." The Allen, Texas, native did just that this year, dominating opponents in college wrestling's second heaviest class. Nickal finished with a 68-match winning streak and a reputation as a wrestler who could pin an opponent from any position. His most memorable fall came against 2016 champ Myles Martin of Ohio State at the 2018 NAAs. With 30 seconds left in the first period of the 184-pound final, Nickal dramatically flipped Martin over and pinned him with an elevator series shortly after the Buckeye put Nickal on his back. The pin sealed the team title for the Lions over Ohio State in Cleveland last March.

Of the 51 total ballots, Nickal finished with 37 first-place votes from the Hodge Trophy Voting Committee. Nolf was second in Hodge voting with 10 votes from the committee made up of each past Hodge winner, national media, retired college coaches from each region and a representative of each national wrestling organization. Four voters cast ballots for a Hodge Trophy to be awarded to both Nickal and Nolf this year.

Criteria for the Hodge include a wrestler's record, number of pins, dominance, and quality of competition. Past credentials, sportsmanship/citizenship and heart are secondary criteria used when two finalists have similar stats.

Nickal had the most pins of the four finalists with 18. Nolf finished with 15 falls, while Ashnault had 8 and Diakomihalis 7. Nickal put up bonus points in all but 3 of his 30 matches for a bonus-point percentage of 90 percent. Nolf's bonus-point percentage was 87 percent, while Diakomihalis and Ashnault were both at 58 percent.

Two of Nickal's 37 first-place ballots came from the on-line fan vote on WIN Magazine's website. Of the nearly 28,000 unique votes cast over a four-day period during the week following the NCAAs, Nickal had 13,892, Ashnault was second with 7,828, Nolf had 5,251 and Diakomihalis ended with 933.

Penn State coach Cael Sanderson is a three-time Hodge winner (2000-2002). Nickal is the third Nittany Lion under Sanderson to win wrestling's Heisman, with David Taylor (2012, 2014) and Zain Retherford (2017, 2018) each having won the award twice.

"We are very happy and proud of Bo winning the 2019 Hodge Trophy," Sanderson said. "He truly had an amazing college career and he will not only go down as one of the best ever, but also one of the most entertaining and dangerous wrestlers ever. Bo had such unforgettable pins in big matches throughout his career."

The Nittany Lion head man was quick to point out that both Nickal and Nolf were the leaders of a remarkable senior class. "Bo, along with the rest of his teammates that came in, in the same class, especially Jason Nolf, Nick Nevills, Anthony Cassar and Shakur Rasheed led Penn State wrestling to four straight NCAA team titles and were undefeated in dual meets in their careers."

Hodge founder Mike Chapman said voting for a winner this year was extremely difficult.

"Every year it seems the competition gets more intense, and this year was no exception," said Chapman. "It is very gratifying to see the number of fans that vote in addition to our esteemed panel of former coaches, media, leaders of various organizations, and past Hodge Trophy winners. "I want to offer my sincere congratulations to Bo, Jason, Anthony and Yianni for the excitement they brought to the sport this year, and for being Hodge finalists."

Nickal said he wants to be remembered for both his wrestling style and for who he is as a person.

"The way you carry yourself is more important than the wins and losses," he said. "I don't define myself by wins and losses. Because of that, I'm able to compete more freely. I've never been afraid to go for certain moves. I like to put on a show for the fans. And I'm not afraid to take risks and go for big moves."

When asked about the legacy he hopes he's left for younger wrestlers, Nickal said he left everything on the mat each time and his approach to the sport made wrestling fun.

"I wrestled freely," he said. "When you watch me, you don't know what's going to happen next. I gave 100 percent in every match, I had fun out there and loved what I did."

Since Nickal moved from 184 pounds to 197, like what Sanderson did for his senior season at Iowa State before winning his third Hodge, comparisons are made between the current coach and his pupil. In regards to who would win the hypothetical match between Nickal and his coach, when Sanderson was as a senior in college, the humorous Nittany Lion said it wouldn't even be close.

"We've been asked that before," Nickal said. "We definitely differ on opinions on that one. I think I would take nine out of 10 against him. And I'm not sure he'd even get the one. It might be 10 out of 10!"

The Hodge Trophy is named after the great University of Oklahoma's Dan Hodge. Still the only wrestler ever to appear on the cover of Sports Illustrated, Hodge won three straight NCAA titles between 1955-1957. He was 46-0 in his three college seasons, pinned 36 opponents and was never taken down collegiately.

Nickal will be awarded the Hodge at Penn State's wrestling banquet on April 14. And as is tradition with the Hodge, Nickal will again be presented the Hodge this fall in front of the larger Penn State athletic community at a football game in Beaver Stadium which holds over 105,000 people.

Nickal's honors are numerous: 120-3 career record with 59 pins, 12 tech falls and 23 majors; 19-1 all-time in the NCAA tournament; 2019 Co-Big Ten Wrestler of the Year (shared with teammate Jason Nolf); three-time NCAA Champion; four-time NCAA finalist; four-time All-American; 2019 NCAA Most

2019, three-time NCAA Champion, four-time NCAA finalist, four-time Big Ten champion, 2016 NCAA Most Dominant Wrestler; 2018 NCAA Tournament Outstanding Wrestler; 2017 NCAA Tournament Gorriaran Award; second on Penn State's all-time pins list (59); T-3<sup>rd</sup> on Penn State's all-time NCAA wins list (19); T-13<sup>th</sup> on Penn State's all-time wins list (120).

Penn State has now won eight team national titles in the last nine years and nine overall. The Nittany Lions nine total titles is tied is third all-time. The crown is head coach Cael Sanderson's eighth as a head coach in his ten years as Penn State's mentor.

The Nittany Lions concluded the 2019 dual season with a 14-0 record and won a share of the Big Ten Regular Season (dual meet) title with a 9-0 conference mark. Penn State has now won 59 straight dual meets dating back to the end of the 2014-15 season. The Nittany Lions won the 2019 Big Ten Championship on March 9-10 in Minneapolis, crowning four champions to run away from the rest of the field, winning by 30.0 points.

Penn State Fans are encouraged to follow Penn State wrestling via twitter at @pennstateWREST, on Penn State Wrestling's Facebook page at [www.facebook.com/pennstatewrestling](http://www.facebook.com/pennstatewrestling) and on Instagram at [www.instagram.com/pennstatewrest](http://www.instagram.com/pennstatewrest). This is **PENN STATE. WRESTLING** lives here.

The following is a list of WIN's all-time Dan Hodge Trophy winners:

Year	Name	School
<b>2019</b>	<b>Bo Nickal</b>	<b>Penn State</b>
<b>2018</b>	<b>Zain Retherford</b>	<b>Penn State</b>
<b>2017</b>	<b>Zain Retherford</b>	<b>Penn State</b>
2016	Alex Dieringer	Oklahoma State
2015	Logan Stieber	Ohio State
<b>2014</b>	<b>David Taylor</b>	<b>Penn State</b>
2013	Kyle Dake	Cornell
<b>2012</b>	<b>David Taylor</b>	<b>Penn State</b>
2011	Jordan Burroughs	Nebraska
2010	Jayson Ness	Minnesota
2009	Jake Herbert	Northwestern
2008	Brent Metcalf	Iowa
2007	Ben Askren	Missouri
2006	Ben Askren	Missouri
2005	Steve Mocco	Oklahoma State
2004	Emmett Willson	Mont. St.-Northern
2003	Eric Larkin	Arizona State
2002	Cael Sanderson	Iowa State
2001 *	Cael Sanderson	Iowa State
2001 *	Nick Ackerman	Simpson College
2000	Cael Sanderson	Iowa State
1999	Stephen Neal	Cal State Bakersfield
1998	Mark Ironside	Iowa
<b>1997</b>	<b>Kerry McCoy</b>	<b>Penn State</b>
1996	Les Gutches	Oregon State
1995	T.J. Jaworsky	North Carolina

\* -- co-winners

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