

From: Bradly Derechailo bderechailo@scarletknights.com 
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To: Bradly Derechailo bderechailo@scarletknights.com

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RUTGERS ATHLETIC COMMUNICATIONS

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

1 Scarlet Knight Way | HighPoint.com Stadium, Suite A | Piscataway, NJ 08854
O: 732-445-7028 • F: 732-445-8899 • www.scarletknights.com • @RUAthletics

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Contact: Bradly Derechailo (office: 732-647-5034; e-mail: bd219@scarletknights.com)

Ashnault, Suriano Advance to Title Matches at Big Ten Championships

Four Scarlet Knights secure NCAA berths during Saturday action in Minneapolis

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MINNEAPOLIS (March 9, 2019) – No. 1-seed **Anthony Ashnault** (149) and No. 3-seed **Nick Suriano** (133) both advanced to the finals of their respective weight classes, while No. 9-seed **Nicholas Gravina** (184) and No. 10-seed **John Van Brill** (157) locked up automatic NCAA Championship bids as Rutgers wrestling closed out Session II of the 2019 Big Ten Championships Saturday night at Williams Arena in Minneapolis.

It marks the first time in program history two individuals will appear in Big Ten title matches, as Ashnault used a 5-1 decision over No.4-seed Tommy Thorn (Minnesota) to advance, while Suriano won a wild 6-3 thriller over No. 2-seed Austin DeSanto (Iowa) to secure his spot in the 133-pound title bout. Ashnault will face No. 2-seed Micah Jordan (Ohio State) and Suriano will take on No. 5-seed Luke Pletcher (Ohio State) on Sunday night, with both title bouts broadcast live on BTN beginning at 4 p.m. ET.

In total, six Scarlet Knights are still alive with two sessions to go. Gravina will wrestle in the consolation semifinals tomorrow morning, while Van Brill will wrestle for seventh. No.13-seed **Shane Metzler** (125) and No. 9-seed **Peter Lipari** (141) will compete in their ninth-place brackets and can qualify for NCAAs with two wins during the morning session on Sunday. No.9-seed **Joseph Grello** (174) will also wrestle tomorrow morning, though his results won't count towards an NCAA qualification.

With its two finalists and two wrestlers in placement bouts, RU is eighth with 45.5 team points.

"Having two guys in the Big Ten finals is a huge deal for this program," said head coach **Scott Goodale**. "Suriano's match was a lot of fun to be apart of and you can tell he's locked in. Ashnault handled his business as usual, and I was proud of how John Van Brill and Nick Gravina bounced back

handled his business as usual, and I was proud of how John Van Brill and Nick Gravina bounced back with wins over ranked guys. We have a lot of guys wrestling tomorrow which is always a good thing."

Suriano was in control throughout his match with DeSanto, using an early takedown to go up 2-0 after the first period while adding an escape for a 3-0 lead heading into the final two minutes. While DeSanto answered back with an escape and stall call to tie it in the third period, a takedown in the closing seconds from Suriano in front of the Iowa bench sealed a 6-3 final. The win avenged an earlier defeat to DeSanto, a 6-4 loss on Jan. 18 inside Carver-Hawkeye Arena.

Ashnault was also in control in his match with Thorn, landing a takedown for a 2-1 lead after one and closing out his bout with another takedown and the riding time point for the 5-1 final.

In the consolation second round, Gravina and Van Brill muscled decisions to punch their tickets to Pittsburgh. Van Brill worked a 3-1 decision over No. 9-seed Griffin Parriott (Purdue) with a takedown in the final minute of the match sealing the win. Gravina battled No. 10-seed Cameron Caffey (Michigan State), landing a takedown and two escape points for a 4-3 final result.

Gravina then advanced to the consolation semifinal bout with a 4-3 overtime win over No. 6-seed Mason Reinhardt. The graduate student can finish no worse than sixth on Sunday.

Metzler worked two decisions over Devin Schnupp (Penn State), including a 6-4 win in the first round of the ninth-place bracket to advance to the morning session against No. 8-seed Malik Heinselman (Ohio State). Lipari, who earned a ninth-place opening-round bye, will take on No. 12 Austin Eicher (Michigan State) in the ninth-place semifinals.

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Rutgers University - DIA
83 Rockefeller Road
Piscataway, NJ 08854
www.scarletknights.com