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Six Badgers punch ticket to NCAA Tournament

Wisconsin in sixth place after day one at Big Ten Tournament

MADISON, Wis. – After the dust settled on day one at the Big Ten Championships, Wisconsin found itself in sixth place as a team, with six wrestlers clinching NCAA berths, and all 10 wrestlers still alive as the tournament heads into Session III tomorrow morning.

It was an up-and-down day for the Badgers, with a lot of great wins and some tough losses.

Sophomore Evan Wick, at 165 pounds, was the first Badger to qualify for the NCAA Tournament. He started his day off right with a pin of Cole Wysocki of Purdue, and then clinched his spot at NAAs with a decision over Indiana's Bryce Martin. For the third time this season and the fourth time in their careers, Wick met Iowa's Alex Marinelli in the semifinals. Marinelli scored the match's lone takedown in the first period. Wick got a point for multiple stalling calls on Marinelli, but couldn't make up the difference and dropped a 2-1 decision. His three losses to Marinelli on the season have been by a combined four points.

The Badgers' other semifinalist was freshman Trent Hillger at heavyweight. After a bye in the first round, Hillger took down Chase Singletary of Ohio State in the quarterfinals to lock in his NCAA berth. In the semis, he faced Gable Steveson of Minnesota. While Hillger improved upon his major decision he lost to Steveson earlier in the year, he fell to the undefeated wrestler by a 10-4 major decision.

Juniors Tristan Moran and Cole Martin, at 141 and 149 pounds, respectively, had tough losses in the quarterfinals to highly seeded opponents, but both also bounced back with impressive victories in the wrestlebacks. Moran knocked off No. 1 seed Mike Carr of Illinois with a 9-4 decision in the consolations after he had lost to Carr earlier in the year, clinching his NCAA spot. Throughout his career, Martin has had the flair for the dramatic, and today was no exception. He beat Nebraska's Jordan Shearer in sudden victory overtime, and then needing to beat Michigan's Malik Amine to secure his NCAA qualification, Martin got a takedown that put him into the lead with less than 15 seconds on the clock to get the win.

Senior Ryan Christensen has qualified for the NCAA tournament his first three seasons as a Badger at 174 pounds, and he made it four today. Christensen had a tight match with Iowa's Mitch Bowman in the first round which he won with a late reversal, and then fell to Myles Amine of Michigan in the second round. Needing one more win to lock in his berth, Christensen defeated Joe Grello of Rutgers by a 4-2 decision.

Rounding out the six Badgers who clinched an NCAA berth was junior Mason Reinhardt at 184 pounds. Reinhardt picked up two narrow wins on the day, first over Norman Conley of Indiana in the first round, and then a 2-1 decision over Brandon Krone of Minnesota which secure his spot at NAAs.

Three more Badgers still have a shot at clinching an automatic berth to the NCAA tournament. Sophomore Beau Breske has had a great tournament at 197 pounds, picking up an upset win over No. 6 seed Jackson Striggow of Michigan in the first round, a major decision over Zach Chakonis who he lost to earlier in the season, and a pin of Jake Kleimola of Indiana. Breske has to finish in the top five to automatically qualify, which he could do by winning his first match tomorrow, or by winning his second match if he loses the first.

Sophomore Ethan Rotondo at 125 pounds and freshman Garrett Model at 157 pounds both could still

grab the ninth place automatic qualifier spot at their weight classes. Both need to win two matches tomorrow in the ninth place bracket. If they do, they'll be onto the NCAA tournament.

Senior Jens Lantz is also still alive in the ninth place bracket at 133 pounds, but ninth place can't clinch a qualifying spot in his weight class.

Session III begins tomorrow at 12 p.m (CT)..

Straight from the mat

Head Coach Chris Bono

On the team's performance:

"I saw a ton of fight today, it was unbelievable. We didn't do it on the front side necessarily. But these guys are working hard, wrestled a ton of matches on the back side, and we overturned a ton of losses that we had earlier in the year."

On wins over previous opponents:

"Tristan Moran beating Mike Carr of Illinois, that was huge win. Beau Breske beating Zach Chakonis from Northwestern, big win. Those were wins that we didn't have in the preseason. Ethan Rotondo beating the Maryland wrestler twice after he beat Rotondo earlier in the season. We are overturning wins which means we are showing progress which means our program is headed in the right direction."

Sophomore Beau Breske

On his offense:

"It felt good, I was keeping my space a lot better. Moving around, getting to my fakes, and just wrestling free and I think that really helped me today. I got my momentum going early in the tournament and it just carried over."

On his progress this season:

"I've definitely seen it in my confidence in my attacks, where I'm attempting more attacks even if I'm not sure if I'm going to get it or not. Just staying focused every day in practice with my conditioning and just doing the little things right."

On his mentality heading into tomorrow:

"I have Nebraska first round tomorrow, so that'll be a good one. Get to wrestle a former teammate. The plan is to win the match and move onto the national tournament. I know what he is coming with and I can't wait for a good day tomorrow."

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