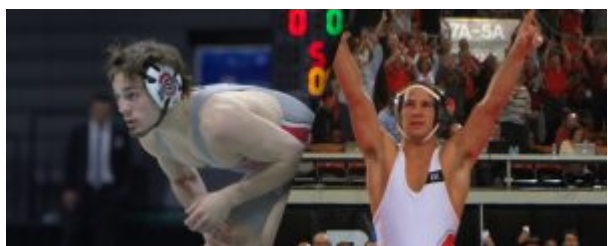


All-Buckeye Battle For Team USA Spot



When Joey McKenna arrived at Ohio State this past fall as a transfer from Stanford, the 141-pound wrestler paired up with former Buckeye and four-time NCAA champion Logan Stieber as his training partner.

After months spent sharpening each other on the mat inside OSU's Steelwood Athletic Training Facility, they become opponents for the first time with a trip to the 2018 World Wrestling Championships at stake.

As Team USA fills out its lineup for the international tournament from Oct. 20-28 in Budapest, Hungary, McKenna and Stieber battle for the 65-kilogram spot on Saturday when the Ohio State products face off in the State College (Pa.) Final X at 6 p.m. ET from Penn State's Rec Hall.

"Preparation going into the match is same as always — trying to game plan and go out there and do what I'm setting out to do, and that's win the match," McKenna said. "But obviously, there's different things at stake. I've been wrestling with Logan since I came here in the fall. He's helped me out a lot this past year and I think I've helped him out a lot, too, so it's an interesting situation where you get to kind of see two teammates and training partners battle it out."

Fresh off a junior season — his first with the Buckeyes — in which he went 21-2 overall with a Big Ten title and All-America status, the rising-senior McKenna meets the 27-year-old Stieber in a best-of-three series.

"It's something that we kind of talked about once the college season was over — that we'd both be in the finals and have to wrestle off," Stieber said. "As we had to go through the process, then it happens. It doesn't always happen, but we thought it could happen. We trained each other to get better and I'm excited to compete. Anytime you get to compete for a world team spot or for a big match, it's always exciting. I have to wrestle Joey — a teammate, buddy — but if I couldn't win, I would want him to win."

While neither will be cornered by members of the current OSU coaching staff, McKenna and Stieber have continued to prepare beside each other in Columbus.

"I'd say we're pretty good friends," Stieber said. "I knew him a little bit before he came to Ohio State. This year, we spent a lot of time together, almost every day wrestling each other. A lot of time just talking before practice. I was his biggest fan all year. I was at Big Tens, nationals and I was loud. I was cheering hard for him. I wanted him to win, just like the rest of the Buckeyes, more than anything. But for him, he was my weight class in college and I wrestled with him every day, so it's a really good relationship."

In the past two months prior to their Final X collision, McKenna and Stieber took different paths

through their navigations of the 65-kilogram weight class.

McKenna advanced when he won the U.S. Open Wrestling Championships from April 25-28 in Las Vegas while Stieber punched his ticket through the U.S. Senior Freestyle World Team Trials Challenge from May 18-20 in Rochester, Minn.

On his biggest stage yet against a wrestler he idolized before college and still looks up to now, McKenna embraces the chance to compete with Stieber.

“At this point, I’m just looking for that opportunity to go represent the United States on a senior world team,” McKenna said. “That’s one of my main goals and one of the main reasons why I came here (to Ohio State), and that’s to pursue world and Olympic titles.”

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