

Carson Kharchla — As Advertised



Editor's Note: If you want to learn more about Carson Kharchla's story and upbringing, click on this link to read a story I wrote for The Lantern in April 2021.

When Carson Kharchla arrived on campus, Buckeye wrestling fans had enormous expectations. He was an Intermat Wrestler of the Year and a two-time state champion in Ohio. Head coach Tom Ryan once called him the best pound-for-pound recruit in his class.

Kharchla's collegiate success became a presupposition — a certainty, of sorts. He was to be in the conversation with Logan Stieber, Kyle Snyder, Nathan Tomasello and J Jagers as one of the best wrestlers to wear an Ohio State singlet.

Still, Kharchla holds firm that whatever his teammates, coaches and fans think he can become, his most prominent believer will always be himself. He wants to be great, and nothing will stop him from achieving his goals. He understands the significant expectations surrounding him, but he ultimately controls his destiny for how great he can be.

Kharchla finished his redshirt season 16-0 wrestling unattached, including four tournament titles at 165 pounds. He looked poised to take over that weight class in 2020-21 and help Ohio State push for the Big Ten and NCAA Championships.

"Once you get to this level, everyone you wrestle knows what they're doing," Kharchla told BSB. "I think confidence and believing in yourself, trusting in your training, and that you know what to do changes everything. I understood that my first year here. I was excited to keep building."

Kharchla looked poised to take over the 165-pound weight class in 2020-21, but he suffered a torn ACL in winter training less than a month before the season began. For the first time in his career, he had to watch his team compete from the bleachers. Instead of building momentum, Kharchla saw all of it come to an immediate halt.

However, not all was lost for the Powell, Ohio, native. Kharchla was willing to do whatever it took to return to the mat. Like many wrestlers had before him, he could recover from the devastating injury — Iowa wrestler Spencer Lee as the foremost example. Lee won a Big Ten championship and a national title at 125 pounds with two torn ACLs last season.

Kharchla endured the long recovery process to wrestle again. When the team doctors cleared him to

compete — albeit with a bulky black leg-sleeve — Ryan did not hesitate to name the redshirt sophomore his starter at 165 pounds in Ohio State's first 2021-22 match against North Carolina. Kharchla was ready for his first career dual meet, though he felt nervous about sustaining another injury against his opponent.

"I started slow," he said. "I didn't have the confidence that I used to have before my injury. I was scared of having something happen to my knee and didn't want to take any risks. That first match did wonders, though. It reminded me that all the rehab and training was worth it."

Kharchla defeated Sonny Santiago of North Carolina, 10-2, in his first collegiate match. He earned the first takedown and led the bout 4-1 after the first period before recording three more takedowns to finish with an eight-point victory.

"I performed well, but I could tell there was like something off," Kharchla said. "I knew that after a couple of matches wrestling, I could envision myself gaining confidence and getting a boost. All I needed was more time and more reps to get more acclimated."

In Ohio State's next six matches, it's safe to say that Kharchla was confident on the mat. He claimed three technical falls, two decisions and a major decision against his opponents. The most significant wins were against Michigan's Patrick Nolan and Iowa's Alex Marinelli.

Kharchla crushed the unranked Nolan 22-6 in a technical fall at 6:30 — an expected result for the then-No. 7 wrestler. However, it was the first time Kharchla didn't wear his brace in a dual, indicating that he had finally become comfortable with his physical ability post-ACL tear and rehabilitation.

"I wore the brace in the beginning because I didn't trust myself," he said. "As the season went along, my knee started feeling better, and I started practicing without it. I felt like it was time to see what I could do in a dual without the extra support."

Kharchla faced the No. 1-ranked Marinelli a week later. The Iowa wrestler is a three-time All-American and a Big Ten champion. The accolades Kharchla hopes to have by the time he leaves Columbus, plus a few national titles. It was a battle from the opening whistle, with Marinelli holding riding time late into the third period. Kharchla needed a takedown to win — he delivered.

"The match isn't over until the whistle blows at the last second," Kharchla said. "Knowing that, continuing to wrestle, knowing where you are and what positions you need to be in, and trusting in your wrestling. It can be a little daunting if you think about, 'Well, I didn't score here. I didn't score now. Maybe I'm not going to score again.' But you have to block that out and go through it."

With the wrestlers deadlocked at the mat's center, Kharchla swept underneath Marinelli's waist and used his upward momentum to topple the top-ranked wrestler to the floor. The official shot his arm into the air with two fingers pointing upward, and the 4,400 Buckeye fans erupted with loud praise.

Kharchla said he had a short thought run through his mind before he made a move to secure a match-winning takedown.

"Just go for it," he said. "If you miss, you miss, but at least you can say you went for it. You have to continue wrestling and wrestle through the whole match."

“There are some matches where things don’t go your way. The first period doesn’t go your way. The second period doesn’t go your way. The third period doesn’t go your way until the last 30 seconds. I’m getting more comfortable in those situations and getting my mind right. Keep wrestling. Don’t give up — stay in it.”

Kharchla said defeating Marinelli offered him a significant boost to carry with him the remainder of the season. Three days after the win, he beat Maryland’s Gaven Bell in an 18-3 technical fall to advance to 17-1 (8-0 in duals). Kharchla did not wrestle against Penn State and Rutgers because of an ailment he suffered in practice the week before those matches. Still, Ryan believes that he will be crucial for the Buckeyes final two duals with Minnesota and Indiana.

“He’s been excellent for us,” Ryan said. “I expect him to continue being excellent. He and so many other wrestlers on this team want to be the best. Carson will give us everything he has. I am sure of that.”

Ohio State travels to Minneapolis for a matchup with the No. 14 Golden Gophers on Friday night before finishing its regular season against the Hoosiers on Sunday afternoon. Kharchla will face redshirt sophomore Cael Carlson of Minnesota and Kasper McIntosh of Indiana in those duals.

After those duals, the Buckeyes will prepare for the Big Ten tournament and NCAA Championships that will take place in late February and early March.

“I expected this season to be tough,” Kharchla said. “It has been that way so far. I have to approach each match with the same mentality. I want to have fun and live in the moment a little bit. I want to take it all in and not stress about things that don’t matter. That’s what can separate me from my opponents. I can do all the little things to make sure I come out on top.”