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David Welch '17 Captures NCAA Division III National Championship in Wrestling

With his victory, Welch becomes the first NCAA champion in RWU history



March 22, 2016 | Nadine Hapst '16

CEDAR RAPIDS, IOWA – For the first time in school history, a Roger Williams University student-athlete has captured the title of an NCAA Division III National Championship. Up against top competition in the March 12 tournament in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, David Welch made RWU history with a 5-4 win to become the first Hawk to claim an NCAA national championship.

Head Wrestling Coach Jon Egan credits Welch's victory to the athlete's dedication to training and serving as the team's wrestling captain, a role in which he inspired each of his six teammates to put their best effort forward at the national tournament and place 15th overall as a team.

"We work so hard to get guys on the All-American podium and David eclipsed that goal by being only the fifth NCAA champ from an all-New England school," Egan said. "With regards to recruiting, we are on the national map now. David shows all future wrestlers that if you focus and sacrifice, anything is possible."

Coming off a 1-2 loss at last year's national tournament served as a trial by fire, according to Welch, a junior criminal justice major. It caused him to dig deep and persevere in his training – with support from his teammates and coach – to secure the national championship this year.

"Some days were easier than others to put that vision in my head of being on the national finals stage, getting my hand raised," Welch said. "And thanks to all the people supporting me throughout my wrestling career, I had never felt so ready for a match like I was when I stepped on that final stage last week."

Welch's achievement demonstrates the excellence of not only the wrestling program, but also reflects the rigorous quality of all athletics at Roger Williams University, according to David Kemmy, director of athletics, intramurals and recreation at RWU. Welch may have earned the first NCAA national championship in RWU history, Kemmy said, but his victory adds to the accomplishments of past Hawks in other intercollegiate championships – Cy Thompson '11 (ICSA 2008 Men's Singlehanded Sailing), the 2011 Sailing Team (ICSA National Team Sailing), and Matt Walby '94 (IHSA 1994 National Championship at Open Fences).

With still another season ahead of him, Welch has already built some impressive stats. He earned a 35-4 record from 2014 to 2015 by achieving 110 takedowns, 33 escapes, 11 pins and 73 duals points. In 2013 to 2014, he earned a 40-4 record with 90 takedowns, 40 escapes, 15 reversals, 10 pins and 69 dual points for the entire team.

"Today, almost a year to the day from hitting an all-time low in wrestling, I stand as a national champion," said Welch, who foresees a career in law enforcement or probation and to one day open a wrestling facility for young athletes. "There's no better feeling than setting out to do something that people think you cannot attain, and proving them wrong. But, most importantly, proving to yourself that no matter what the circumstances, you have the ability to come out on top!"