

# Champions crowned at FILA Cadet Nationals in Akron



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AKRON, Ohio -- The ten-member Cadet Freestyle World Team, which will compete in Baku, Azerbaijan, August 21-27, was determined this weekend at the National Championships held on the campus of the University of Akron. During Sunday's finals matches, Tommy Thorn from Minnesota was the lone wrestler to make a return appearance onto the squad.



Tommy Thorn is back on the Cadet World Team after winning the title at 50 kilos (Photo/Jeff Beshey, The Guillotine)

Last year in the Cadet World Championships at 46 kilos, he won the first two matches and then lost in the semifinals to finish seventh place. This year, Thorn jumped up one weight class to 50 kilos. Entering the championship match, he won all five previous matches in two straight periods. Likewise, his opponent Stevan Micic from Indiana had yet to lose a period from his seven bouts on Saturday.

The pair of Cadet National freestyle champions from last summer in Fargo -- Thorn at 105 pounds and Micic at 98 -- wrestled a tight first period, which Thorn won 3-3 due to a two-point exposure off a cement mixer right before time expired. Thorn came out strong in the second period with two takedowns, then got an exposure and a lengthy hold off that second takedown to close out the 3-3, 5-0 victory.

"I'm happy to make the team, and ready to win (the World title) this year," Thorn said. "I learned a lot about the foreign styles last year, and feel I can thrive if I keep the pressure on the opponent."

The other finals match featuring a pair of champions from last summer's Cadet Nationals in Fargo was at 76 kilos, where Chance Marsteller from Pennsylvania dominated a very game Zach Beard from Oklahoma 3-0, 6-0 in two periods. Prior to the final, Beard had amassed a 7-0 record against some very tough opponents, including five victories by either shutout or pin.

However, Marsteller came in with an even stronger Saturday performance -- going 6-0 without giving up a single point on four techs, a pin, and a shutout decision. That continues a pattern of absolute dominance for the two-time undefeated state champion and two-time Cadet National freestyle champion.

"Regardless of opponent, I just want to push myself technique-wise, conditioning-wise, and pace of match wise so I'm prepared for when the tougher matches occur," said Marsteller, who was also motivated by a disappointing FILA Junior National tournament where he went two-and-out.

"I just didn't get the work in I needed before that tournament to beat the college opposition I faced," added Marsteller. But I trained very hard before this to redeem myself, feel that I did, and I'm looking forward to doing my best at Cadet Worlds."

He'll be joined on the World Team by another wrestler from Pennsylvania in Zain Retherford, who was named the tournament's Outstanding Wrestler after winning the 63-kilo weight class, which was the tournament's toughest. In seven matches on Saturday to advance to the final, he did not lose a single period against three scholastic state champions, two state runners-up, and a sixth opponent that was a Beast of the East and

POWERade runner-up.

Retherford's finals opponent was Bryce Brill from Illinois, an All-American in his two prior FILA Cadet appearances and a 2010 Cadet National freestyle runner-up in Fargo. Prior to the final, Brill had absolutely dominated his six opponents to the tune of five pins or techs and only giving up points in two of his 12 periods.

Things kind of started that way, as Brill jumped out to a 3-0 lead in the first period off a one-point takedown and then a two-point takedown with exposure. Retherford had two takedowns in the later portion of the period but still lost 3-2. It was a different story in the second period, when Retherford jumped out to a 2-0 lead and then scored a late counter takedown with exposure to seal that period 4-1.

Brill scored first in the third on a takedown, but Retherford was able to score a reversal off of an attempted lace by Brill to go ahead, and then scored a match sealing takedown late off of Brill's attack to win the match 2-3, 4-1, 2-1.

"I didn't cut any weight, and (Brill) was the biggest opponent I faced," said Retherford. "After the first minute I was able to adjust to the strength and started to get to my attacks, angles, and offense."

"It feels awesome to make the team, and I can't wait," added Retherford. "This is what I've been working toward."

Joining those three on the team will be a pair of wrestlers from Blair Academy in New Jersey -- Jordan Kutler at 101 pounds and Joey McKenna at 119. Kutler, a National Prep champion during the high school season, earned his way onto the team with a 4-1, 6-0 victory over Mitchell McKee from Minnesota.

"I've improved a lot over the last year being at Blair," said Kutler. "(Head) Coach (Jeff) Buxton pays a lot of attention to me, and works with me win or lose. It all paid off (in the form of this title), and was a lot of fun."

McKenna, who placed third at the FILA Junior Nationals at 55 kilos, dominated his way through this tournament with an 8-0 record and only giving up a single point along the way. He also had six victories by pin or technical fall.

The championship match started out in similar form, as he won the first period 7-0 with a three-point feet-to-back takedown and then a pair of consecutive gut wrenches to end the period. It was a little tighter in the second period, with the lone point coming on a push-out to seal the 7-0, 1-0 victory.

"The kids at FILA Juniors were stronger and older, so you have to be in better condition and shape," observed McKenna about wrestling against the higher-level opposition. "Then when wrestling kids at my own age and level, it's easier to score and get to my offense."

Interestingly, this is his first major freestyle title while in high school, despite earning a pair of Cadet National Greco-Roman championships. "Those past disappointments, and placing lower than in Greco which I do just for fun, gave me even more drive to finally get it done," McKenna added.

At 58 kilos, Seth Gross joins Thorn as a World Team representative from Minnesota with a three-period victory over Anthony Giraldo from New Jersey, who had made the finals despite losing a match during the pool competition. Gross, a Cadet National freestyle champion last summer at 112 pounds, won the first period 1-0 on a takedown, but Giraldo bounced back to win the second period 2-1 with a two-point takedown/exposure, though Gross scored a takedown late in the period to shrink the margin.

Gross scored the initial point of the third period on a pushout call, and got a second point when that call withstood the protest of Giraldo's corner, which wanted a three-point feet-to-back granted to him. However, the officials judged the pushout to occur first. Giraldo did score a late takedown, but could not get a turn or score after they were put up to neutral.

"I just try to stay in position, avoid giving up dumb points, and score at any time I can," said Gross, a 2011 InterMat JJ Classic champion. "I've been training for the World Team ever since the season ended, and I'm truly grateful and blessed for the opportunity."

Entering this morning's 69-kilo final, it was guaranteed that a wrestler from Allen, Texas would be the representative for a second straight year -- with both Jack Bass and Bo Nickal making it to the final. Last year Oliver Pierce won this weight class at FILA Cadets, and was fifth at the World Championships in Hungary.

Their paths to the final could not have been more different. Yesterday, Nickal went 7-0 with four pins, including ones over Mark Hall of Minnesota -- the nation's top incoming ninth-grader -- and 2011 Cadet National freestyle champion Dylan Milonas of New Jersey. On the other hand, Bass went 6-0 but had two matches go into the third period, and lost the first period in another match that he won by fall in the second period.

However, on Sunday morning, it was Bass who controlled the show in a 4-0, 4-0 victory. "I just looked at this as practice," said Bass. "We're drill partners and know each other extremely well."

"I just tried to stay out of the ties and get to my shots," he added.

Incoming ninth-grader Andrew Nieman, who will be attending Stillwater High School in Oklahoma, made the team at 42 kilos with a 3-0, 2-0 victory over Chris Cuccolo from New York. In Nieman's four matches, he did not give up a single point. He is the lone member of the team to not have at least a state championship final appearance on the resume. In fact, all but Bass (a two-time runner-up) have at least one state or National Prep championship medal.

Seniors-to-be Mitch Sliga from Indiana and Garrett Ryan from Arizona are the last two members of the team. Sliga, a double Cadet National champion the last two summers in Fargo won the 85-kilo title 1-0, 2-0 on a pair of offensive clinches over Eric Morris from Pennsylvania. Morris was one of four wrestlers that Sliga beat during the two-day tournament who finished top three in Cadet freestyle last summer.

"It was about conditioning and heart," said Sliga in terms of how he was able to navigate the tough road on the way to a title. "I was ready every match, as I knew one loss was all it would take to derail my chance to get this incredible opportunity (to wrestle internationally at the Cadet Worlds)."

Ryan, the 100-kilo champion, was the lone wrestler to win both the Greco-Roman and freestyle tournaments in Akron this weekend. He did so with a 2-1, 2-1 victory over Trae Story from Minnesota in which he got out to a 2-0 lead in each period.

During this past season, Ryan went 53-2 in winning a state title at 170 pounds. Shortly after the season, he indicated that he got up to about 195 pounds. He's also grown about one or two inches in height since then, and kept on adding weight, weighing in this weekend at 219.

"Since I'm tall with big shoulders, I just decided to keep lifting heavy to keep growing into a college 197 or heavyweight," said Ryan.

Rounding out the champions was Nathan Butler from Kansas, who won the heavyweight (125-kilo) weight class, which is not one that is contested at the FILA Cadet World Championships. He earned a 4-2, 7-0 victory over Billy Miller from Ohio in the final, but in reality the title was won on Saturday when he beat Michael Johnson Jr. from Pennsylvania, 2-1, 0-2, 1-0 in the pool competition.

Johnson was third in Cadet freestyle last summer in Fargo and had beaten Butler to win the Greco-Roman title on Friday afternoon. "I got experience out of wrestling him (on Friday)," said Butler about beating Johnson. "I knew he was a big kid, maintained good positions, and that I would have to create better attacks to win."

**Finals Results:**

42 kilos: Andrew Nieman (Oklahoma) dec. Christopher Cuccolo (New York), 5-0, 5-0  
46 kilos: Jordan Kutler (New Jersey) dec. Mitchell McKee (Minnesota), 3-1, 6-0  
50 kilos: Tommy Thorn (Minnesota) dec. Stevan Micic (Indiana), 3-3, 5-0  
54 kilos: Joey McKenna (New Jersey) dec. Zac Hall (Michigan), 7-0, 1-0  
58 kilos: Seth Gross (Minnesota) dec. Anthony Giraldo (New Jersey), 1-0, 1-2, 2-1  
63 kilos: Zain Retherford (Pennsylvania) dec. Bryce Brill (Illinois), 2-3, 4-1, 2-1  
69 kilos: Jack Bass (Texas) dec. Bo Nickal (Texas), 4-0, 4-0  
76 kilos: Chance Marsteller (Pennsylvania) dec. Zachary Beard (Oklahoma), 3-0, 6-0  
85 kilos: Mitch Sliga (Indiana) dec. Eric Morris (Pennsylvania), 1-0, 2-0  
100 kilos: Garrett Ryan (Arizona) dec. Trae Story (Minnesota), 2-1, 2-1  
125 kilos: Nathan Butler (Kansas) dec. Billy Miller (Ohio), 4-2, 7-0

**Comments**

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[TomHaupt](#) (1) a week and a half ago

Congrats to Garrett Ryan (Arizona)@100 kilos. Watched him several times during last seasons HS season and he was a stud. He'll represent the USA extremely well!

[Michael Meek](#) (1) a week ago

I couldn't agree more. Have been watching Garrett for a long time...he's smart, tough and a destined for success. Good Luck Garrett!

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