



2019 NCAA Championships May 16-25 • Orlando, Fla. • USTA National Campus

Men's final: Recap, All-Tournament Team, Quotes

#2 TEXAS def. #4 WAKE FOREST, 4-1

Orlando, Fla. – The Texas Longhorns are NCAA men's champions for the first time in program history, after outlasting defending champs Wake Forest, 4-1, in the title match at the USTA National Campus.

In a clinching No. 2 singles match that embodied the larger contest as a whole, junior Yuya Ito dug out of a set-and-a-break hole to defeat the reigning NCAA singles champion, Petros Chrysochos, 3-6, 6-3, 6-4. Ito was later named the tournament's Most Outstanding Player.

Wake Forest was in command early, after taking the doubles point—typically the team's weakness—and building early leads on four singles courts.

But the Longhorns didn't panic. Instead, they slowly shifted the momentum until they were the ones with a vise grip on the match.

"Before you knew it, we went from not playing very well in singles and being behind on a lot of courts to me looking up and realizing we were a point or two away from winning this whole thing," said Texas interim head coach Bruce Berque. "It snuck up on us. These guys competed fantastic."

As the match wore on and grew more physical, the veteran Longhorns locked in.

"Honestly, I think we just died physically today," said Wake Forest head coach Tony Bresky, referencing his team's grueling 4-3 win over North Carolina less than 24 hours prior. "As the match got physical, [Texas] shined. They were prepared and they were tough."

On Court 1, ITA No. 7 Christian Sigsgaard overturned an early break to defeat Borna Gojo, 6-3, 6-4, and put Texas on the board. On Court 6, Rodrigo Banzer won a slew of deuce points to come back from a 5-2 deficit in the opener against Siddhant Banthia and ultimately score a 7-5, 6-4 win to give the Longhorns a 2-1 advantage.

When Texas senior Colin Markes defeated Wake's Melio Efstathiou at No. 5, the Austin outfit was one win away from glory.

It soon became a case of when, not if they would seal the deal.

Another Texas senior, ITA No. 80 Leonardo Telles, held two match/championship points in a second-set tiebreak at No. 3 singles. But the Demon Deacons postponed the inevitable, as Bar Botzer won the breaker, 10-8, to push the No. 3 singles match to a third set.

That shifted the focus to Courts 2 and 6, where Ito and senior Harrison Scott were putting the finishing touches on a pair of three-set comebacks. An hour earlier, Scott trailed Rrezart Congu, 6-2, 3-0, and 40-love. But the senior battled back to take the second in an 8-6 tiebreak, then raced to a 5-0 lead in the decider.

But before he could rise from his bench at the end of the changeover, Ito served out the match on Court 2. The final game was not without its own drama, as Chrysochos turned a 30-0 hole into 30-all through some desperate defending.

But Ito stood strong on serve, ending the overall match on the Longhorn's fourth collective championship point.

"I don't even know how I did it," Ito beamed. "He's a really good player, I mean obviously he's won a lot of titles in college and I have a lot of respect for him."

It was the first time in the 2019 outdoor season that Wake Forest's Top 2 singles players both lost.

"If we're going to win the doubles and then you're going to beat us at No. 1 and No. 2, all the credit in the world to you," reflected Bresky. "The odds of that happening are very slim. Texas earned the title today."

For a Texas squad that rostered five seniors—four of which competed in Sunday's singles lineup—the program's first title is even sweeter.

"I think it's a definitely a good way to go out," Harrison reflected, "We've been doing this for four years and working so hard every day. This season was really special, the team really clicked.

"We wanted it so bad, we kept working every day and I think the five seniors knew this was our last shot and we wanted to have no regrets. I think we can now say we have no regrets."

The Longhorns victory also bookends the collegiate season at the USTA National Campus. Texas won the first of over 300 collegiate dual matches at the facility when they defeated Mississippi, 7-0, to open the USTA Collegiate Series. On Sunday, they ended the season by winning the last men's dual match of the season at the site.

ALL-TOURNAMENT TEAM

Singles:

- 1) Oliver Crawford (FLORIDA)
- 2) Yuya Ito (TEXAS)*
- 3) Bar Botzer (WAKE FOREST)
- 4) Brian Cernoch (NORTH CAROLINA)
- 5) Andy Andrade (FLORIDA)
- 6) Rodrigo Banzer (TEXAS)

Doubles:

- 1) Borno Gojo / Alan Gadjiev (WAKE FOREST)
- 2) Brian Cernoch/Benjamin Sigouin (NORTH CAROLINA)
- 3) Chih Chi Huang / Yuya Ito (TEXAS)

Most Outstanding Player:

Yuya Ito (TEXAS)

QUOTES

Texas junior Yuya Ito

On defeating the 2018 singles champion in Petros Chrysochos:

I don't even know how I did it. He's a really good player, I mean obviously he's won a lot of titles in college and I have a lot of respect for him. I'm really happy that I got the win today, I played for the team today and I think it worked out well.

On what changed the match when he was down a set and a break:

All year long, we talked about staying together and not letting go of the rope, not giving up. I just tried to get as many gains as I could, it turned out I did come back and win. All I was thinking was just to compete and stay out there as long as I could.

Texas senior Harrison Scott

On being a senior winning the title:

I think it's a definitely a good way to go out. We've been doing this for four years and working so hard every day. This season was really special, the team really clicked. I mean we could've had things go the wrong way in the middle of the year, but we all stuck together. Coach Berque did a really good job of keeping us together and keeping us focused and encouraging us. We wanted it so bad, we kept working every day and I think the five seniors knew this was our last shot and we wanted to have no regrets. I think we can now say we have no regrets.

On staying on track after losing their head coach:

It's about leaving that kind of stuff off court. We knew we had a job to do and we all came and played for each other. So, we knew when we got to practice every day, we know we had to practice hard and not let things affect us. A lot of teams thought they could get us down or use that against us, that we wouldn't be there mentally, but I think we really proved a lot of people wrong. We stayed focused and we didn't let that affect us. I'm proud of the team sticking to the gameplan and not letting it derail us.

Texas Interim Head Coach Bruce Berque

On the importance of not falling further behind on the scoreboard after the doubles loss:

That was big. Really, it wasn't going that well for us early in singles. We knew we had a chance at No. 1 and No. 2, but we also thought that's where they were the strongest. Those guys throughout the years have probably been the strongest No. 1 and No. 2 in the country. For our guys to beat both of them was amazing. That gave us a huge lift.

But to tie it up at No. 1, but every point counts, it's a race to four. Every point we could get was fantastic. Before you knew it, we went from not playing very well in singles and being behind on a lot of courts to me looking up and realizing we were a point or two away from winning this whole thing. It snuck up on us. These guys competed fantastic.

This one over here [Harrison Scott] has played in a lot of matches like that in his career and I reminded him when he was out there that he's played a million matches like this. He was down a set and almost 4-0, and when that match ended he was up 5-0 in third. He did a fantastic job, but he didn't get to finish it. But to put himself in that position, when it looked as desperate as it did, is a real credit to his character and care for the team. He's been doing it for four years. I couldn't be happier for him or the team.

On stepping into the head coaching role and coming out with a national championship:

I think it feels exactly the same now as it would've if I were the assistant coach, which was my previous role, or a head coach at the beginning of the year. When you get to this moment and you're part of a national championship team and you know you have that with you forever and that you'll share this bond with the team forever, that satisfaction and that pride overwhelms everything else. I didn't come from outside the program either. I was there, we were working together for four years. I'm not sure whether I stepped in or slid in.

On whether he thought they had to win at No. 1 or No. 2 to have a chance to win:

I thought it'd be a huge boost to the team. Somehow, we won both of them. I thought if we could win one of them that'd be fantastic, but to win two of them... I don't know if I was counting on winning both of them. That was a huge lift. I thought we had a really good shot at the doubles but it didn't go my way, I thought we were really strong at the bottom of the lineup but if we could get something happening at No. 1, No. 2 or No. 3, it would be a big lift to us.

Texas Interim Head Coach Bruce Berque (continued)

On the concern of losing the doubles point:

That's not a strong point for [Wake Forest]. We played Yuya [Ito] and Chih Chi [Huang] and they did a fantastic job. As a freshman, Chih Chi won. The last two days they did amazing. The No. 1 team is really tough to play; those guys are so powerful that it's kind of a crap shoot. We didn't probably play our best as a team in doubles but they played very well [Wake Forest.] We thought that was a point we had a good chance to win but I always tell these guys that we are going to fight as hard as we can for that 14 percent of the match. We're going to act like it's the most important thing in the world and when it's over, win or lose, we're going to pretend it doesn't matter much because it's only 14 percent. That's the approach we've had.

We've beaten other good teams this year after losing the doubles point, so I don't think there was a sense of panic from anybody. We thought we had a good shot at that but I watched these guys and I watched Wake Forest and knew they were as great team. But I had so much confidence in these guys that I thought if we competed well in every spot we'd have a chance to win anyway.

On what point he thought they were going to win:

I was running around with Colin [Markes], he was kind of hanging on and I was trying to keep him composed in the moment too. I looked around and looked up at Leo's [Leonardo Telles] score and Yuya [Ito] was up a break in the third. And I looked up and said to one of our guys who was watching that we were only two points away from winning. I honestly had no idea we were that close to winning until we were literally two points away. I don't know how many dual match points it took to win, it was probably the fourth one... fourth time's the charm.

Wake Forest Head Coach Tony Bresky

On what made the difference in the match:

First off, congrats to Texas, they played a great match. They showed a lot of toughness and heart after losing the doubles point. It could've easily fazed them that we won the doubles point, so that was a nice surprise. I honestly just think we died physically today. I think yesterday probably caught up to us a little bit. We really could have used some rain or a thunderstorm or a delay, just to postpone a little bit. We got off some good starts, we were up breaks, just didn't finish off a couple of the sets. As the match got physical, they shined. They were prepared and they were tough. I don't think it was that we weren't tough. Yesterday was a tough match and the conditions were tough and it really got to us. Credit to Texas for taking advantage of that.

On whether Texas was more used to the hot condition, being a southern school:

Maybe a tiny bit. We've been here a while now. I just think playing a little later yesterday, just the emotion of that match, the last match on... couple of guys just a little sick and fought through it yesterday. Rrezart [Cungu] was fine, his guy [Harrison Scott] was just playing great at No. 3. I think that Bar [Botzer], Petros [Chrysochos] and Melios [Efstathiou] really felt the heat. Sure, that's all a part of it, getting used to playing in those conditions and they play in them a lot. It's just part of the NCAA team event; you've got to deal with it. It takes a while, you've got to deal with adversity and deal with the situations and conditions. If it rained, we would've had to play indoors, which may have favored us, or if it was windy or cold. You've just got to deal with it. One team ends up dealing with it better and that's what they did today.

On whether defending the title created more pressure:

No. The guys were excited, they were anxious to go, they were looking forward to competing. Obviously, we played one of our better doubles points. Like I said, Borna [Gojo] was up there, Petros two breaks, Rrezart two breaks, Melios got a break, Siddhant [Banthia] for the first set.

You know really, we could've gotten five first sets. If we get three of those or four of those, it's a totally different match. We give so much credit to Texas because Borna's guy [Christian Sigsgaard] came back, even Petros' guy [Yuya Ito] didn't win the first set but came back and made it closer so it made it more physical. Melios' guy [Colin Markes] right away broke back and Siddhant's guy [Rodrigo Banzer], I mean Sid was on 5-2 in that set and had set points, and his guy just won all the big points and that just changes the match. It puts a little scoreboard pressure on you, guys are kind of looking around. They have a ton of experience, ton of seniors; they handled the moment fantastic.

Wake Forest Head Coach Tony Bresky (continued)

On the physical toll the match was taking on the team:

When Chris [Eaton, assistant coach] and I changed spots, things weren't going great on a few of the spots. Even going to Melios, even early in the second set, his guy looked fresh and he looked like he was struggling a bit. I knew even if he would've pulled out that second set it would've been tough. I could sense it with Borna, once he gave away that first break, it was going to be tough. I think from our standpoint, if we're going to win the doubles and then you're going to beat us at No. 1 or No. 2, all the credit in the world to you. The odds of that happening are very slim. Texas earned it, they earned the title today. Love my guys, they're absolute warriors. What a year for us to be able to come back and compete for the national title. I think we didn't obviously accomplish quite what we wanted to, the boys left it all out there.

On whether there was another match where both No. 1 and No. 2 singles lost:

While we were healthy with Borna and Petros, no I don't think we lost another match at No. 1 and No. 2. In outdoor tennis, we hadn't had a 4-3 match yet with a full lineup until yesterday. Yesterday was our first 4-3 in outdoor tennis [in semifinals against UNC] when we had a full, healthy lineup. We were confident in the conditions, we were confident in how we played, we were ready to go. We started the match but then started to slip away a little bit.

On what was going well for the team in the beginning

I think it's different on every court and that's the beauty of dual matches. There're six different matches. Borna got off to a good start, I had a bad feeling there once he got broken back, he played a really sloppy game. I think it was up 4-2 or 3-2 whenever he broke for the guy to get back in there. Petros got off to an amazing start. I really think that the 4-0 game where he got broken at deuce is huge. If he gets that, he's going to have a lot of juice left for the next two sets.

I think Rrezart, the killer for him, he was set up, and 3-0, 40-love on his own serve. Absolute killer to lose that game. Credit to Harrison [Scott] for winning that game, and hanging in there. I think if Rrezart would've gotten that game it might have changed the momentum of the entire match. Same with Sid, I think he had either deuce or 30-40 at 5-2. If he gets that, it's a routine set and he's feeling good. I think he had deuce again at 5-3. I think he lost four deuce points in a row, and that obviously changed it. Again, give Texas credit. Their guys did a great job of not panicking and continued to fight and play good tennis and put the pressure on us.