

[https://www.columbiamissourian.com/sports/mizzou\\_sports/missouri-wrestling-takes-over-mu-student-center-for-open-practice/article\\_e2fec810-ac56-11e6-9f08-2794b4508fed.html](https://www.columbiamissourian.com/sports/mizzou_sports/missouri-wrestling-takes-over-mu-student-center-for-open-practice/article_e2fec810-ac56-11e6-9f08-2794b4508fed.html)

# Missouri wrestling takes over MU Student Center for open practice

JASON LOWENTHAL

Nov 16, 2016



The Missouri wrestling team practices at the MU Student Center on Wednesday. Practicing in the MU Student Center gave the team a chance to promote Missouri wrestling and let fans see the drills the team runs during practice.

KATELYN MET

COLUMBIA — Hundreds of students filled the MU Student Center Wednesday afternoon. Some were studying, some were conversing and some were grabbing a slice of pepperoni pizza from Pomodoro.

In the middle of it all, the No. 5 Missouri wrestling team was practicing.

“I do some crazy things,” head coach Brian Smith said.

The Tigers held an open practice for one hour with black mats spread across the main level of the student center. For many, it was an opportunity to watch the team in action for the first time, despite its success over the past five years. Missouri has captured five consecutive Mid-American Conference championships and finished sixth overall at the 2015-2016 NCAA Championships. Senior J'den Cox has two individual NCAA titles and an Olympic bronze medal to his name, as well.

Smith said the idea for an open practice developed while he was walking a recruit and his father through the Student Center.

“It perked me up right away,” said Smith, who also served coffee to interact with students from noon to 2 p.m. Monday as a way to promote the team. “Seeing the way we train and push each other and battle out there, it brought some interest to the program. That was our goal.”

During warmups, some of the team members had fun with the open venue. The 197-pound Cox gave 133-pound redshirt freshman Jaydin Eierman a piggyback ride. Amid the sweat, redshirt junior Willie Miklus smelled bacon cooking at Kate & Emma's.

“It smelled pretty good,” Miklus said. “That's a great combo (of smells), right?”

One student joked with his friend about waging a thumb war against Cox, only to end the joke by saying he'd likely have his thumb broken.

Smith called the team together, and it was practice as usual for the Tigers, who completed drills ranging from takedown defense to headlocks and even turning a few backward somersaults with a mix of classic rock songs blasting in the background.

“We knew it was going to be a lot of drilling and we were going to have to be careful,” Cox said. “We did our best to get a good sweat in and advertise for this upcoming weekend and get prepared.”

Attendance for Missouri's revenue sports is down across the board this year. Barring a substantial turnout in its final home game against Arkansas, the football team is on track to have its lowest average attendance since 2002. Men's basketball hasn't been much more

impressive after a mere 3,977 people filled the stands in the team's season-opening win Sunday night. Wednesday's open practice was another chance for the wrestling team to market its "#TigerStyle" brand directly to students and promote its upcoming dual against Virginia Tech.

The No. 5 Tigers will be on the mats against the No. 6 Hokies in another atypical venue — Jesse Auditorium — Sunday at 1 p.m. It will be the third time Missouri has used Jesse Auditorium as a location for a dual.

On Jan. 16, Missouri narrowly escaped with a one-point win over nationally ranked Cornell at Jesse Auditorium. Cox said the setting puts the team in the spotlight in a literal sense.

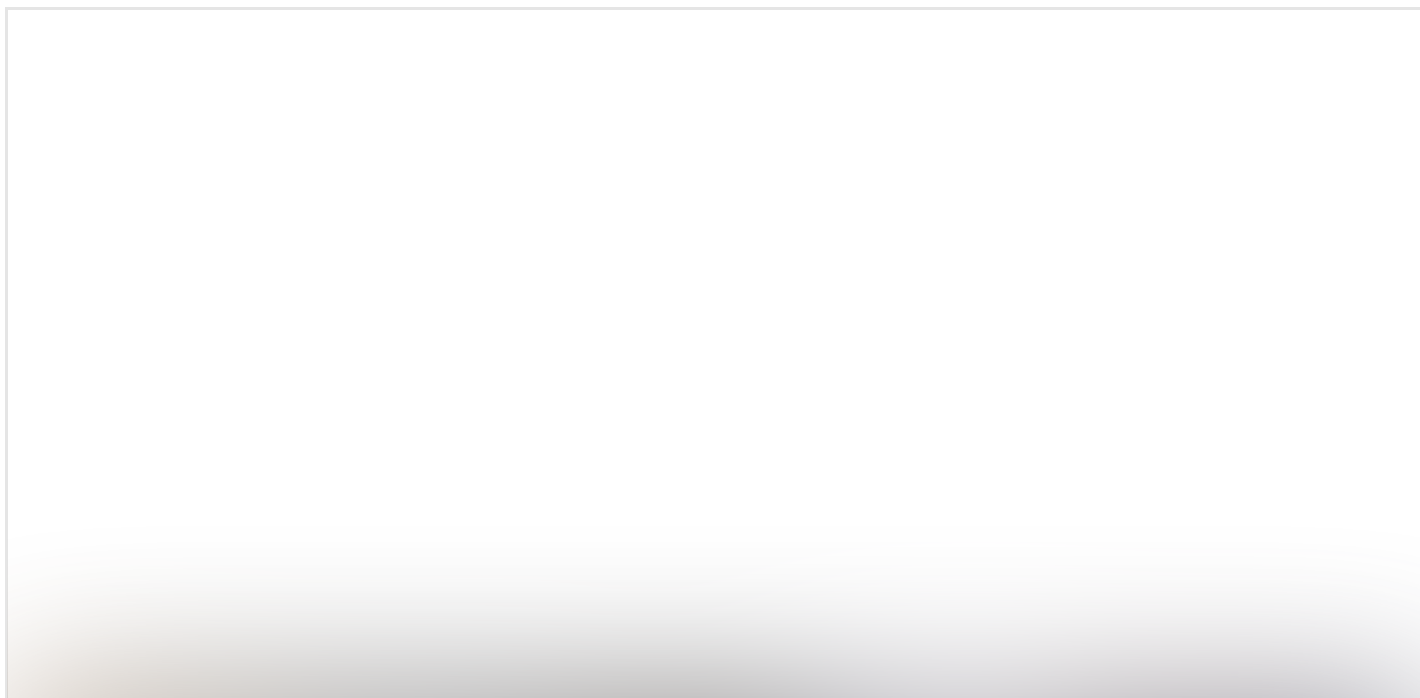
"I guess you always feel like you're in a heroic scene," Cox said. "I'm looking forward to it."

As for the next non-traditional venue, Smith said his ultimate goal it to eventually host an outdoor dual in front of the MU Columns or on top of the Broadway Hotel in downtown Columbia. Last season, No. 4 Iowa hosted No. 1 Oklahoma State at Kinnick Stadium, its football stadium, in front of a record-setting crowd of 42,287.

"It's a very tough sport in collegiate athletics," Smith said. "It's a grind. To make it fun like this where they can have this experience, they'll remember it."

*Supervising editor is Brooks Holton.*

#### **MORE INFORMATION**





Olympian and first responder J'den Cox says he's enjoying a return to normalcy

Welcome reception Wednesday for Olympic medalist J'den Cox

Tigers ready to wrestle wins at MAC Championships

---

## Jason Lowenthal

Spring 2018 assistant sports editor and copy editor. I am currently a senior at the University of Missouri School of Journalism and intend to graduate in May 2018 with a degree in print & digital sports journalism, minors in business and Canadian studies