With the Men's College DI National Semifinals only a day away, the players of University of California- Santa Barbara and Bowling Green State University are not letting nerves get the better of them in this step to the championship match.

The UCSB scrum packs down against Stanford.

UCSB's Mitchell Raisch said, "Our team has been set on taking home a national title all year and we have worked very hard to get this far. Everyone is very excited to be in the national semifinals but we are not done yet. Our ultimate goal has always been to take it all the way so we have been preparing our nerves and are confident in our abilities."

UCSB went undefeated in their league season. They remarkably never let up more than one try in a match, except against Loyola Marymount University in the last game of the league season. But just because their defense has been airtight does not mean that the offense has suffered.

The Gauchos averaged almost 50 points a game in the regular season.

Stephan Salimi credits the performances to the team's fitness. "Every morning when everyone at our school was be sleeping we'd be running," he said. "Conditioning is what carried us to where we are now."

Bowling Green is just as prepared, according to captain Nick Viviani. "Several of the older players have been paying this level of competition for a few years now," he said. "We are the most experienced that we have ever been before, now we just got to come up with the 'w'. We will shake off the nervousness in the first five minutes of the game."

The Falcons only lost one game this spring, to the Detroit Tradesmen RFC, but they were certainly tested in their quarterfinal game against Florida. The match was closely contested and Bowling Green managed to escape with a 21-18 win.

Max Narewski said, "The forwards have been working on scrums a lot after the Florida game… the Gators really put our forward pack play into perspective."

Narewski highlighted the overall team mentality as a big factor in their success this season. "We just worked well together, we are a team not a handful of individuals playing together," he said. "When you play 15 as one you can't go wrong… that is the major part of why we have made it this far."

Viviani has been leading his team well and his players have confidence in him. "… we have a lot of players that have been here before or have played in games like this," Narewski added. "Plus our captain Nick Viviani has played many games like this. Having a leader like that helps everyone stay calm and keeps us from getting nervous."

Both sides think that the most important battle will be up front, relying on the forwards and set pieces.

"… our backs are very similar to UCSB's backs," Viviani said. "I have seen footage of their backs and I admire their style of play… It is a similar style to ours and the key to win the game will be the difference in our forwards. If the backs cancel each other out, the forwards have to make the difference."
Salimi said that the forwards are going to focus on winning the set pieces and if that happens, everything else will fall into place.

Practice for the two teams has been intense as expected, with UCSB players getting up at 6 a.m. to condition and do strength training. Bowling Green even made the trip a day earlier to get used to the dry air and change of time zones.

For both sides, the determination to make it to the national title game overrides any nervousness they might be feeling. "We will always play the game as if there is no tomorrow," Viviani added. "I am definitely not allowing this game to be my last time that I ever play in a BGSU uniform. I want the title and the team and I will not settle for anything less."

Salimi stated: "We've always played with confidence and everyone is focused on the match ahead; if people are nervous they're definitely not showing it, but the butterflies always come the day of or right before a match, We'll just have to wait and see."