

U.S. Olympic Team Trials - Swimming

Sunday, June 16, 2024
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Lucas Oil Stadium

Carson Foster Gretchen Walsh Media Conference

Q. Gretchen, you were talking yesterday about the belief Todd has had in you and seeing things that you were capable of. Saw the video of the embrace with him and also with Alex. What were their messages to you right after you achieved this lifelong dream?

GRETCHEN WALSH: I think just the hug says it all. They are so proud of me, and I can say that I actually brought Todd to tears for the first time ever, which was an exciting moment for me. I was like what does it take to do this?

But yeah, I mean, Alex and Todd have been with me every step of the way since last Trials, and it's just this was a full-circle moment for me and for them. This whole journey has been full of ups and downs. But I'm just really happy to be on such a high right now and have them alongside me experiencing it.

Q. Tough misses in 2021 and now you turn around and you get it done. What's been the feeling just since you've made the team?

GRETCHEN WALSH: I saw Carson after my race, and we just had the biggest hug. We talked to each other about what it was like back in 2021 and related to each other. That's definitely a hard setback to process. And I'm so proud of both of us for coming back on top, and just doing exactly what we needed to do no matter the cost.

CARSON FOSTER: Similar to Gretchen. Like I think even just coming here this week, as much as I've grown, I think there was still a fear because of what happened three years ago coming to this meet.

So tonight, just like being behind the blocks and feeling like a new sense of confidence about it, and like -- because Gretchen and I were just talking about this right out there. Like it takes years of practice and years of work to feel good about that. So to touch the wall first, and then seeing Gretchen right after she made it, as well, it's a full-circle



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moment for sure.

Q. Carson, it looks like your free style is much stronger than in past years. Can you talk about a change in strategy? And additionally, is there a mental component to what made you so much stronger in the final 100?

CARSON FOSTER: Thank you. I think my free style definitely is better. I don't think that's totally why I had a better split tonight. I think it was mainly, I've struggled -- and I don't think this is a surprise to anyone, but I've struggled in the past with staying in my own lane. The first thing that goes wrong in my race in the past, it was lights-out for me and I would just battle those inner negative voices.

Tonight was just different, and I worked on everything I've been working on and staying in my own lane, sticking to my strategy that I know works that I do it in practice and that I do in practice meets. Then just knowing when I turn on the freestyle that I was going to be the fastest one in the pool, and that like I think it was just -- I was smiling the whole last 50.

Ever since 2021, I've worked with a mental performance coach. First was Susannah Muller. She helped me so much.

And then now I work with Jim Murphy, best performance coach in the world, I think, and he's done wonders, and he got me right for tonight.

Q. After the race, you looked pretty emotional afterward, after touching the wall. Can you talk about that moment and everything that was going on?

CARSON FOSTER: Yeah, I think the last 20 meters, I was like, I'm fairly certain I'm winning, at least like I knew to the side I was breathing on. But I was still trying really hard to stay in my own lane.

So I immediately looked to my left and saw that I had won, and at so at that moment it, was such a big relief. All the work and everything, mental and physical, that was such a relief and also just being able to look over at my family and them going crazy.

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And then giving Jay and Chase a hug because they were the ones consoled me three years ago.

Q. Coming into tonight, when you've set a world record the night before, what is that mentally like? Do you let it creep into your head? It was a pretty loaded field and obviously a great race and took another great time from you.

GRETCHEN WALSH: Going into tonight, I was definitely nervous. I just had a lot of like, 'what ifs' going through my head of just being like -- coming off of breaking a world record and thinking, well, I need to do that again or I might miss the team; and what if I get third, and what would that even look like?

Because going into this meet, I don't think people had many expectations for me, and last night kind of set a lot.

So I had a talk with my confidence coach today and we were just saying, like, all I have to do is execute, and that's what I have been telling myself this entire time. It's really -- we say nothing more, nothing less. Just execute.

So I went into tonight knowing that that's all I needed to do, stick to my race plan, stay in my lane like Carson said, and was just able to get my hand on the wall first. I'm obviously so proud of Torri and Regan; the fact that it took a 55-mid to make the Olympic Team this year in that event is absolutely unheard of.

I'm so excited for America's success in that event come Paris.

Q. Following up on that, such a loaded field, would you talk a little bit about Torri? You've competed against her. Three years ago, she was talking about her lack of confidence before she made it and finished fourth at the Olympic. Just the back-and-forth with you and the rivalry, and how it will push you now as you head to Paris?

GRETCHEN WALSH: Me and Torri have been racing forever, honestly. Like the first time we really got to know each other is back in 2019 at the Worlds in Budapest. I really enjoyed getting to know her over the course of those years, whether it be in meets like this or NCAA swimming.

She's a great competitor, and someone that I just have really tried to, not like mimic, but you know, she's been setting the pace in this event, and so her times are what I've been striving for. Just to even race her in a field like this is pretty crazy, and I was so proud of her for getting second because I know how much she wanted it and just

all the work that she's put in.

You know, we all struggle with confidence, and it's just a hard sport, honestly, to be able to stay in your lane and perform at the exact right moment and I'm just happy that she won a best time, I won a best time, and I think that we are going to be able to do some pretty amazing things together in Paris just pushing each other and knowing that we are competing for Team USA, representing the same flag. It's a pretty powerful thing.

Q. Carson, congrats making your first Olympic Team. There's no doubt going to be a little French guy waiting for you in Paris in this event; that's going to be a tightly contested race, no doubt about it. What sort of confidence boost is this getting the job done when you needed to get it done today?

CARSON FOSTER: I obviously don't know what going the Olympics is like because it's my first time. But from what I've heard, Trials is the hard part, and that seems to be what it's been like the last couple of years at World Championships.

So it definitely feels good to get it done tonight when it seems like -- I mean, I don't know what the stadium is Paris, but I doubt it's going to be like that. That may be a little bit easier.

In regards to Leon, I enjoy racing Leon. I think I said that last year, as well. I'm still trying my butt off to beat him. But it is really cool to swim against him and to try and challenge him, and he's just a good guy. He's been in Austin the last few weeks, and he's just a fun guy to be around. So I'm excited to get to race with him and Chase in a couple weeks.

Q. When you think back on your mental journey just in long course in general, not just this event, but the past couple years, when do you feel like you got over the hump in the past year or two and got to a place where you can come to a meet like this and perform like this?

GRETCHEN WALSH: Yeah, honestly I think the most challenging event for me to really get a grasp of again was the 100 free, and I'm swimming that in two days.

But I really made headwind on that event specifically, I think it was two summers ago in Irvine at Nationals. I just finally went a :53 again, and I went a :57 again in my 100 fly at that meet. Just even getting close to my best times from 2019 when I was 16 years old, I was so proud of myself in that moment, and it was a huge -- I knew I had crossed a barrier, and that the sky was the limit at that point.

Still experienced some ups and downs from there, but knew that I had a strategy and that I was capable of what I always thought I could do.

So I think that summer was really important for me just in terms of getting back to where I thought I was and then moving forward and getting to this point today.

Q. You both have been so open today and in the past about coming back from disappointments, specifically in 2021, working on your mentality and things like that, and now you're sitting here. What kind of a message do you hope young swimmers or young athletes in general can take away from the journey you guys have had the past few years?

CARSON FOSTER: Yeah, thank you for asking that. I think that's been something that I, three years ago, when I was approached and asked about working with a performance coach or mental coach or confidence coach, I was almost a little bit offended. Deep down, I knew I needed it, but I was like, I don't need that. It's just kind of the stigma towards it.

But I would not -- I 100 percent guarantee that I would not be sitting up here if I had not done that. So now seeing the benefit of it and seeing what it actually is, it's like, this is awesome. We are going to remember this forever. But also, we are going to go home and wake up tomorrow morning and everything is going to be normal. Just kind of understanding it puts perspective in swimming a little bit, and we do it at a high level that sometimes that's lost. But it's still just swimming at the end of the day, and we've still got our families that love us, and we love them.

So it's totally changed my career.

GRETCHEN WALSH: Yeah, I mean, just to mimic that, I mean, I also would not be here today if I had not reached out for help. I honestly started seeing Kristin even before my disappointing Trials, but it took a lot for me to make it a regular habit of talking to her and seeking her advice.

Even when I was performing really well, like it's important when you're at your highest and when you're at your lowest to just keep doing that because you never know when you are -- it's hard to know when you are fighting inner demons and when it's important to just talk to someone about them.

So I would just say, like, it's totally changed my career. I'm going to do it as long as I swim, and -- yeah.

Q. In the same vein as what you've been talking about, you mentioned kind of getting back to where you

thought you should be or where you could be, and you of course grew up with such high expectations. What did you learn about yourself by the route that it took to get here?

GRETCHEN WALSH: That's a good question. I feel like I realized that it's important to listen to people when have faith in you and they have confidence in you, and not to let that just, like, become a weight on your shoulder of pressure.

It's important to take what people say and really believe in it, especially those like your family, your coaches, your friends. They are the people who know you best. And actually listening to that, I think it took awhile for me to accept that maybe I am capable of doing stuff like this. Like maybe Todd isn't crazy for thinking that I can break an American record.

And just like believing in that and thinking about it every day as a goal, I just -- those are the people that I've learned that I need to lean on. It's important in those moments, and they are going to be the ones who are there every step of the way, and telling you, like, Gretchen, you can do this. You are capable more than you'll ever know. So shout-out to them.

But definitely a moment of realizing that this sport doesn't need to be so independent for me. It can be a dependent one, too.

Q. Another thing that you guys have in common is that both of you have siblings who are also competing at the highest level at the Olympic Trials and could make the Olympic Team. What has it been like to compete together at such a high-stakes meet?

GRETCHEN WALSH: I'm a little different than Carson in the sense that me and Alex don't really overlap at events as much. I feel like you and Jake -- well, not anymore.

But yeah, just like hugging Alex after that race, it's just a full-circle moment. Again, like back in 2021, watching her make her first-ever Olympic Team was a dream come true for me as a sister.

Like I've never been so proud, and just to have that feeling be reciprocated. She was more upset than me that I that I didn't make the Olympics last time, and I think that says a lot about our relationship. We definitely rely on one another. We relate to each other. We support one another. At a high level, high-stakes meet that's so stressful, it's nice to have a sibling on the deck just there to even give you just a smile or nod that you got this.

CARSON FOSTER: Similarly, I was just thinking when she said that, I remember in 2021, I didn't cry. I don't know if I was a little bit numb to the emotion just because you feel so much when you get third and when you have disappointment.

But I didn't really have any, like, emotion crying-wise after 2021. I remember after my third event, which is my last one, the only person that cried was Jake, and he cried for me.

At that point, then that was a little bit hard emotionally, but similar to Gretchen. It's like, Jake has been my biggest supporter through -- ever since we became competitive at this level, along with my sister, Hannah, who supports us from afar, and even though she's not swimming any more.

The hug with Jake tonight was incredible, and yeah, it almost feels like we're connected when we swim. I get just as nervous for him, for his races. I get just as excited for him, his races.

So I'm going to say some prayers over the next few days for him.

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