

2024 NCAA Wrestling Championship

Wednesday, March 20, 2024

Kansas City, Missouri, USA

T-Mobile Center

Aaron Brooks

Keegan O'Toole

Carter Starocci

Parker Keckeisen

Media Conference



has that been a positive for you guys to come together, to put that room together?

PARKER KECKEISEN: Not having a room, I think it's brought us closer together. It's just like when COVID happened -- gotta find a way to get better at wrestling or are you going to let the circumstances control you? We found a way. We got to built a room together. It brought us closer.

Depends how you -- Doug tells us all the time, are you going to put this script on it. So I think we turned it into a positive. And now we're here. The guys we compete against, I don't think they care if we have to shower at home or if we get to have a locker room. It don't matter. I'm just going to go scrap.

Q. Aaron, we'll start with you. Go ahead if you have a comment or just ready for questions.

AARON BROOKS: First and foremost, I want to thank everyone, all my support, Pat, Rick, all you guys who make it possible for us. Just super grateful to be here. Praise the Lord.

CARTER STAROCCI: I'm Carter. Same thing along with Aaron, I'm grateful to be here and ready to go.

KEEGAN O'TOOLE: It's nice to be here. Only an hour and a half drive, but same as those guys, grateful to be here. Praise the Lord.

PARKER KECKEISEN: Happy to be here. AC is pretty cool. So praise the Lord, let's go.

Q. Carter, the obvious question is your health compared to two weeks ago. What recommendations would you make to the seeding committee for someone who went through like yourself?

CARTER STAROCCI: As far as my health, I'm ready to go. I'm 100 percent. And so I think that was just kind of a little frustration on my end because I was ready to go. But ultimately it was a coach decision. You've got to respect it.

As far as the seeding, I think this is more fun this way. And I guess the committee -- as far as that, I honestly really couldn't care less. I'd rather wrestle everybody, honestly. But I think they seeded it a little weird. But again, it doesn't really matter.

Q. Parker, you and your team have had outside distractions, not having a room, having a room. How

Q. Carter and Aaron, you guys both are looking to become four-time national champs this weekend. And also potentially some history could be made where you guys are as far as the team race. Do you look at this any differently than the past times you've been in the NCAA Tournament? And how do you prepare for this weekend with those goals in mind?

AARON BROOKS: No, it's the same.

CARTER STAROCCI: Yeah, I think I approach it the same. Just I think the next title is always the more fun one. So just really exciting.

As far as a team-race thing, I don't think any of us on the team are kind of looking at that. We're kind of just focused on the first match at hand and doing our best.

Q. Keegan, can you assess how you felt how seeding went for you this year? And areas you feel with your wrestling, obviously you won the event before, but as you know you never can stop learning in this sport, right?

KEEGAN O'TOOLE: I definitely think going over to the U23 Worlds was a really good challenge. Had a really tough training schedule for that in the summer. And me and Aaron actually roomed together for that. That was a



fun tournament. But we got tested a lot.

Other than that, it's just the evolution, try to get better every day in areas that maybe you have never thought you would explore and playing around in those.

Q. Aaron and Carter, the fact that you are both doing it at the same time, Aaron, when we talked at Big Tens, you talked about the brotherhood of Penn State wrestling. How similar are you to Carter or how different? I was hoping Carter could answer the same thing. I mean, most people think you guys' personalities are so different. Does it show the strength of the Penn State room? Talk more about that.

AARON BROOKS: What's your question?

Q. I want to understand the relationship between the two of you, because some people might think you guys are (indiscernible), but how similar are you, how different are you, the fact that you guys were brought together in college and now you're ready to make history at the same time?

AARON BROOKS: When we first came in at 2019 we both saw that we kind of had the same goals and aspirations. I think over the years, regardless of (indiscernible) get into different training schedules, at least for me, looking over and seeing him, I know he's in the same mindset when it comes to being the best wrestler you can be.

You think of the brotherhood and the team. No one is the same. People can be similar but I think that's the chemistry. So there's things that he brings out of people that's good, and there's things that I bring out of people that's good. Very blessed to have a mixture of that. We're very different leaders, but we both lead.

CARTER STAROCCI: I've known Aaron ever since I was a little kid. I was always traveling a lot. He was always winning. So I was always watching his matches as a young little kid. I always looked up to Aaron.

Like he said, when we came in in the summer session I just saw how dedicated he was. And I was, like, this is going to be a fun time just because I was never around that.

I don't know, just watching him go about his day and things like that. He's a kid I've always looked up to, even though close in age. So he's someone I always look up to and I watch his matches. And I try and take some of his moves and stuff like that.

And our team, again, I think it's kind of like Aaron said, everyone's different, and I think that's a credit to our coaches that they're able to make everything work.

Q. Keegan, what do you make of the opportunity to do this in KC, in Missouri? Is it more pressure there? What do you think of being in KC?

KEEGAN O'TOOLE: I think it just makes it more fun because we'll have a lot more Mizzou fans. I also think that Kansas, we've got two guys on our team that are wrestling Rocky Elam, Zach Elam from Kansas. So really great opportunity for them.

It's just nice that I only had to drive an hour and a half to get here. And on Sunday I'll drive an hour and a half to go back home. It's just another tournament.

Q. To have a strong showing here, and possible to win another championship, what would that mean to the program and what would it mean to KC wrestlers?

KEEGAN O'TOOLE: I think it would just show that you can be successful wherever you go. I think that you each have to take advantage of every opportunity you get and make the most of it and enjoy the ride.

Q. Parker, tell me how it was hosting Folkstyle Nationals and thoughts you got from it working the table and seeing those kids wrestle?

PARKER KECKEISEN: Hosting Folkstyle Nationals, it was fun, but it's a fundraiser for our PWC. I'm sure I'd be going and watching. But, I don't know, we get to have guys like Drew Foster and Taylor Lujan in the room. And some of those dudes are some of my best friends.

It's awesome we get to work, roll up mats, do the dirty work, but it's fun. I don't know, you get to see, I don't know, I was just that young a while ago.

I look back and I didn't really compete that much when I was younger. And it was just, like, I almost kind of wish I did. Keegan always competed all the time. He always made fun of me, actually.

But just to see the enjoyment and how much fun those guys were having, because I don't really like competing that much. It's a good perspective. I don't know if I really answered the question, but it was fun.

Q. Parker, we talked a little bit on Monday a lot about you, but I'm curious, with a guy like Ryder Downey and Wyatt Voekler how you're excited to see them compete on the stage and what you think those guys are

PARKER KECKEISEN: I think those guys are capable to be wrestling Saturday night. I think those guys are real good. I get to train with them every day. Ryder Downey is one of the grittiest guys I've ever seen wrestle. The only seven minutes, you're going to be fighting and then some.

And Wyatt, I get to warm up with Wyatt. He's always keeping it loose. I know he'll keep it loose and go wrestle hard for seven minutes. That's kind of the UNI way. If there's time on the clock, you still go fight. And those two are going to go fight. When we fight, I think good things are going to happen.

Q. Keegan, obviously one of the primary big match-ups of this tournament from the last year has been you and David Carr. Just how much has he pushed you to just become a better wrestler as you guys have kind of squared off? I think this could be time five or six here now.

KEEGAN O'TOOLE: It will be number five. Anytime you have someone that good in your weight class, they're going to push you to get better in the areas you're weak at. He really showed me where I was weak the first two times I wrestled. He kind of put it on me.

But this weight class has a lot of good wrestlers. It wasn't just him that pushed me this year. I've had many battles, many wars. Each and every day, each and every competition I'm learning a lot.

Q. Aaron, going back to Fargo, I remember you and Trent Hiday going at it. You've had so many battles through the years. You've come out on top of those, but is there a healthy respect that you have for him in the match-ups that he's given you over the years?

AARON BROOKS: Yeah, he's a competitor. He wrestles hard. He's in my weight class, so...

Q. You moved up a weight this year. Some (indiscernible) guys in your room moved up in the weight class, last year when he won his fourth, how has it been wrestling at that weight and how far are you from 86 kilos right now?

AARON BROOKS: 86, I don't think about it right now just because that's a good bit ways down. 97's been good. I just grew. It's better for my body to wrestle up here. And we'll focus on 86 when that gets here. It's been fun. I'm glad I've got to come to a new weight class. Different competition. It's been fun.