

2023 NCAA Wrestling Championship

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Kansas City, Missouri, USA

T-Mobile Center

Carter Starocci

Semifinals Media Conference



THE MODERATOR: Now we have with us from the 174-pound Championship, Carter Starocci. Carter is from Penn State. If you could give us general comments about your match.

CARTER STAROCCI: Yeah, it's always fun being out there and going against Shane. He's a tough kid. For me it's easy to wrestle really good matches because you know he's going to bring it and be tough. It's more exciting. I don't have too many comments because it's in the past and now we're going to take on the finals and get that fourth one.

Q. Carter, talk about your offense, how you've had to change it, modify it a little bit up against guys that know you have a knee brace on. It's different this time around. How have you had to modify your offense to accommodate for that and how have you approached these matches this weekend?

CARTER STAROCCI: Yeah, it's definitely an adjustment for sure. It's an adjustment that when you walk out there, and you're like, wow, this is different, just because when you're at practice, guys are helping you out and things like that. But there's tactics and things like that, but at the end of the day, who wants it more, you know? So you've got to be able to protect yourself out there and get to your offense. I think it's -- it's the same, but it's different, like you said. But when I'm out there, I really couldn't care less about my knee. I chose to wrestle. So if it stays in Kansas City it stays here and you can always repair that, so that's the mindset going in.

Q. Carter, can you just take us through your mindset coming into this, knowing what you've gone through the past two weeks here in general?

CARTER STAROCCI: Yeah, it's a lot. Definitely a roller coaster for sure. I think having such veteran guys around me, like the coaching staff, my teammates, my family, having people in my ear is good, but by the same token, I don't know if it's so good because I'm the type of guy, if you

tell me I should do this, I want to do the other thing. And if I want to do something and you tell me to do that, now I want to do something else. But at the end of the day, I have to make sure I'm always listening to the coaches because they've done everything I wanted to do. And the mindset is just the same. Every single match it's to go out there and get your hand raised. That's the bottom line.

Q. To be able to wrestle two national champs on the same day and have neither of them score a point on you, what does that mean to you?

CARTER STAROCCI: I don't know. I mean, I can feel like -- I mean, those guys are really good wrestlers, but when you wrestle me and the lights are on and those ankle bracelets get strapped up and the butt clenches up a little bit and those nerves kick in, it's a whole different ball game. It's something that you can't prepare for. I'm coming for you the whole time. You can't really game plan, and the coaches are yelling from the corner things to do and I'm thinking in my head, you come out here and see if it works for you.

Q. Yesterday you gave up a couple of early takedowns, you were sluggish. Today you seemed better, what changed for you?

CARTER STAROCCI: I think that goes along with the first question he asked over there, tactics and things like that. It's one of those numbers when you get out there, you learn when you're out there. There is no experience or knowledge, like -- or there is no knowledge like experience. You can talk this whole game man and this and that, but when you are out there you have to be able to make end game adjustments and at this point it's about being smart and living to see another day. That's a different strategy I have had to learn being here this weekend because usually when I smell blood in the water, I go after it. It's no different, but this time you gotta to be a little more precise.

Q. Carter, you're on the brink of history. How do you kind of not keep that out of focus, I guess you could say, while still doing the task at hand?

CARTER STAROCCI: It's one of those numbers where



like every single day you wake up on Monday, Tuesday, you kind of envision yourself making history every single day. So when you are actually living it, it's as if it's not so real. Because when you're in your bed and you're thinking about it, it almost feels so real and when you are out there it goes by so fast and your teammates, you're cheering for them. So it's a lot more going on when you're actually living the experience and in terms of staying focused, history comes and goes. And it's something that when I go out there and it's tomorrow night and I win and it's cool everyone is screaming your name and a month later it's Olympic Trials and it kind of fades as time goes on. So you can't let the sport be bigger than it is. It's something we love to do and it's something that for me I wouldn't rather be anywhere else in the world than right here. You couldn't put me in California on a beach or whatever. I want to be here. So it's one of those numbers where you just enjoy it because you can't really do this game forever and that's a weird thought, but while I'm doing it I want to do as much as I can.

Q. You got Welsh in the finals. You got to wrestle him once this year already. What did you take away from that match that you think you can build upon?

CARTER STAROCCI: I think the more times I get my hands on someone it favors me. My ability is to learn and pick these guys apart.

It's something that I think is what separates me. Yeah, it's another match that I'm going to go out there and I'm going to go forward, I'm going to impose my will and score points and get my hand raised.

Yeah, I mean, it's no different as if it was anybody else in the entire bracket.

Q. You guys have been a dominate team for a long time, obviously there were guys in the lineup before you, you came in as a freshman, didn't skip a beat, continued that trend of winning titles. Now you're a senior, the leader on the team. How has your leadership aspect changed for you to push the younger guys, Mesenbrink already in the finals, Covak coming through the other side. How has that changed for you as you are reaching for your goals and still trying to pull those guys up?

CARTER STAROCCI: I think the leader on the team are Coach Cael Sanderson and the other coaches on the team. And you see them lead by example every day and I look at these guys, they're there every single morning. When we come back from NCAAs, you think we're the team champs, let's celebrate those guys in the room and it's bright and early. To see the commitment of those guys,

it kind of just puts this fire into you and almost being at Penn State for me it's one of those numbers where when I was in high school coming up I was eating clean at lunches and everyone was like, that food looks dry and nasty and it's all one big joke, but at Penn State it's cool to be your best self and it's almost like you're encouraged to be the best version of yourself and always asking questions, find like the small things that make a difference, even if it does or it doesn't. If you think it's making a difference everyone is on board supporting you, so I think that's the big power at Penn State.

Q. It was a month ago where you couldn't walk off the mat and we really didn't know if we would see you here.

Now you're in the finals. How did you -- what was your rehab process like? How did you get yourself to a point where you were even in a position to make this run?

CARTER STAROCCI: Yeah, I think it's just a testament to mindset, to your belief, you know? I think this time it really drew me closer within myself and I looked to God a lot more, too.

It's one of those numbers that I gotta make sure that when this is all said and done that I keep on that journey and keep my relationship with God going every single day, not just when my back is against the wall. And I need to heal up in a short amount of time, you know what I mean? So it's one of those things I look well beyond wrestling and using these things -- and it's tomorrow night so I want to make sure I'm staying on that path for my entire life. It's been a long road every single day from 6 in the morning to 11 at night doing something to get a little bit healthier and keeping that faith. I think at the end of the day, if you're healthy or not healthy, I mean, I remember Aaron Brooks made a comment to me one time, are you really that good -- if you need to do every single thing right just to win, are you really that good. I thought about it and that's a good way of looking at it. You should be able to win under any circumstances, that's what he was kind of getting at.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

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