

2023 NCAA Wrestling Championship

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Kansas City, Missouri, USA

T-Mobile Center

Carter Starocci

Finals Media Conference



CARTER STAROCCI: Yeah, I just want to say I'm happy to be here. I'm happy that my family and my coaches and my trainer, Dan -- and that was something that I always wanted. So it was very exciting and it was fun to be out there. So all thanks to God always.

Q. What did this win mean to you especially with the adversity that you had to go through, not just in the last two weeks but the entire season?

CARTER STAROCCI: The entire season was, it was up and down just with a lot of outside factors going into this year. And as the season went on, it rung a bell after my freshman year, after I won. I went in the office of Coach Cael and he said, this first one's going to be your easiest one.

I looked at him, like, I don't know about that. I plan on getting better and making this thing easier. But sure enough, now looking back on it I would say each one has their own challenges. But he's earned everything, so you've got to listen to everything he says.

Q. Talk about tonight, workman-like victory, but your path getting there was a difficult path. Just talk about your tournament.

CARTER STAROCCI: It was a fun tournament. Like I said, there's nothing I'd rather do right now in this life than be here wrestling. I couldn't be more happy and more grateful. I don't think you can put me in a different scenario. So, I mean, this is where I want to be.

As far as the tournament, it was fun seeing that I can overcome this adversity. I think that's just a testament to how I was brought up -- my family, my parents just always being tough and expecting nothing but excellence and always doing better. I think that's just a testament to that.

Q. We've talked to you all season about how this would be your fourth title. You make history, history, history. How does it feel now that you've completed

that task? And considering the adversity you faced to get here, is this one a little bit sweeter?

CARTER STAROCCI: I don't know if it's a little bit sweeter. I think it's bittersweet just realizing, dang, I'm already a senior. That was probably my last folkstyle match. I don't know, it's hard to process all that when you're in the storm because, like, you're trying to lay low.

And just having Greg be up first, I want to be watching Greg and watching Beau and watching Mitch, but I've got to kind of focus on myself because that's what's going to help the team most.

It's not what you think as being on the inside, but you've got to be able to dial in and focus.

Q. You're the sixth guy to have ever won four national titles, but you're also only the second to have won -- not just 174 pounds, but at the same weight. What does it mean to have been so dominant in your weight class these past four seasons?

CARTER STAROCCI: That's why I do it right there. I wouldn't say I do this for any titles or anything like that. For me what gets me out of bed is to be able to take everybody on. That's kind of what's scratching my ego a little bit, is knowing that there's no one that can beat me.

Like the titles and the rings, I have my titles hanging up. But everything else I don't really know where they're at. Just me going out there and beating people, that's what's fun for me, because that kid was trying to get chippy at the end, things like that. I'm thinking in my head, this is not where you want to take it. But we can take it however he wants to.

Q. It was to this day exactly when Coach Cael got his fourth. So to be able to accomplish that, looking back over that history and knowing what he's meant to you, can you put that into words?

CARTER STAROCCI: I think Coach Cael was the first wrestler to win four titles with an African-American coach. And I'm half Black and Aaron is also half Black, so if he

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wins that would be an African American right there. He'll be the first coach to coach an African American wrestler too.

It's funny how history repeats itself a little bit. That's pretty interesting. It's cool, just like I said, just seeing how those coaches, how much they care about us. It's something that I never experienced before just me growing up. I was always so hungry, always so driven to get better.

It was really rare to find that. And then coming to Penn State, everyone's like that. It really starts with the coaches. They're in their late 40s, and every Saturday morning they're doing our workouts. This morning I was a little heavy and a little more than I wanted to be. And Coach Cael was right there riding the bike with me, just looking around, like all the other guys warming up, their coaches are on their phones. I'm, like, this dude is in the foxhole with us. I think that means more than anything.

Q. Could you talk about your injury at all and how limiting that was in this tournament? And what it was like to wrestle with that injury?

CARTER STAROCCI: I have no comment on the injury itself. I chose to come out here and wrestle. With that, the mindset is you can't really have excuses. And for me even talking about it really doesn't do any justice because that's in the past. I'm moving forward. I'm focusing on healing. We made a lot of progress.

Like I said it was a long road. 12 days ago I wasn't even walking. It's just a blessing, even the Big Ten situation, obviously I wanted to wrestle and I was ready to wrestle, but just having my coaches on my side and things like that.

I was frustrated at the decision and things like that, but it's just all part of it. It's all just one big storm. It's all one big story. And this is my story and you've got to take it day by day, honestly.

Q. You've been talking about the Olympic Trials for some time now. Is that still your plan to wrestle in a month at State College in the Olympic Trials? And is your plan still to wrestle at 74 kilograms?

CARTER STAROCCI: That's the plan. I've had some doctors ask me, hey, what are your goals and things like that. I've obviously told them I want to win Nationals, win and Olympics. They said, what's most important. I said the Olympics.

There was some discussion about not wrestling in this tournament, things like that. But, again, me as a competitor, it doesn't sit right with me watching my guys go

to war and I'm just cooped up and just watching. That's not who I am. And the plan is 74 kilograms in State College, April 19th and April 20th.

Q. What are your chances of coming back for year five?

CARTER STAROCCI: I don't even know. I haven't crossed -- I haven't crossed today's road yet. Like I said, it's been a long journey. I love wrestling. I don't love school. Maybe do eanie meanie miney moe and see where that lands. Like I said, I am not even thinking about it right now.

Q. Can you talk about just what it means to have represented Penn State University in that singlet; it has a rich tradition, the last 13, 14 years have been amazing with Coach Sanderson, what's it mean for you to be a huge part of that culture?

CARTER STAROCCI: It's a dream come true. It's one of those dreams that me coming to Penn when I was getting recruited I didn't want to come to Penn State, just 'cuz my family wanted me to go to Penn State so -- I was like don't want to go there anymore, but after getting over that hump, realizing what's best for me, just again I just can't thank our coaches enough. I know we all say and we all preach, I think it's something you guys wouldn't understand -- I think Coach Casey can get offered X amount of dollars to go anywhere else. If he did, I think that program would have a chance to win a team title.

But I don't see any of those guys going anywhere. It shows the level of commitment and how much love they have for the program and how dedicated they are. I'm just another guy that's crossing through and following their patterns, and they're going to keep that tradition going.

Q. Did you know you were going to raise your trainer's hand at the end when you were celebrating with your coaches, or was that pre-planned or just kind of in the moment?

CARTER STAROCCI: It was kind of in the moment. I had some thoughts what I was going to do, and I didn't do any of them. But I don't know, like I said, he's the man behind this whole thing. Without him, like, who knows where I would even be?

And just his level of expertise -- when you go in the Penn State room and you look back, the entire years, years back when Penn State wrestling first started, he's in the same outfit smiling.

He goes way back. He's definitely a legend. I just think us

wrestlers get all the credit all the time. I don't know, he's the real champ tonight.

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