

2023 NCAA Wrestling Championship

Saturday, March 23, 2024

Kansas City, Missouri, USA

T-Mobile Center

Coach Cael Sanderson

Finals Media Conference



CAEL SANDERSON: Just proud of our guys. Great effort by 10 kids, and then the whole crew of 37 or whatever our roster is. Super grateful to be a part of this and them. Our coaching staff are the best, and it's great to be a part of things. Just happy to be here.

Q. You were a four-time champion. You just crowned two more. What's it mean for you to be in the corner for guys like that? And what do they mean to the program that you've built since you've been there?

CAEL SANDERSON: I think it's just, as a coach, every year you just want to see your kids smile at the end of the season and seeing them reaching their goals. Obviously in situations with, like, Carter and Aaron, the pressure mounts. But they both are competitors, and that's what they live for, that's what they were born for. And just happy for them.

Q. Now that the end of the season's here, you guys have had so much history over the past three days between Carter and Aaron and the team points and then margin of victory. Can you kind of put it into words what it's like now?

CAEL SANDERSON: Just going to be ready for next year. That's what we do. We always think ahead preparing for the future. We'll be back in the room on Monday. We love what we do. We love to train. We love the sport of wrestling. Happy for the guys.

Obviously I say this every time but your heart and your mind, you just kind of expect to win and you believe and expect that your guys are going to win. So it's the ones that don't quite reach their goal that occupy your mind and your heart.

I thought in the Finals, all of our guys wrestled really well. Bartlett wrestled really well. Just didn't work out at the end. And Mesenbrink, he's such a beast and wrestled really well. They had great tournaments. All the way through our lineup. So, we're happy and we'll just keep working.

Q. Talk about how building for next year starts Monday already. How much does the upcoming Olympic Trials play into that? And how many of your guys are participating in that?

CAEL SANDERSON: Everyone that's qualified. I'd have to think about that, which I'm not great at doing when the light's on me. So I'll avoid.

But that's just part of the plan. That's the way we designed the season. And these guys are thinking about the Olympics. They're very competitive, as we know.

And so it will just be about getting ready for that. I think we're, what, four weeks out, and it comes fast.

Q. You talked about admiring athletes who have a lot of expectations and go out and win anyway. Could you talk about the expectations placed on Carter and Aaron and their performance going out in the face of those expectations and winning?

CAEL SANDERSON: Yeah, I think there's pressure and expectations right away they have for themselves because they obviously planned on winning as freshmen. So it's not like all of a sudden they have this chance to win their fourth. It's something they've been working on for four years.

Just more about them being able to just be themselves and focusing on the things that work and that just is eternal principles. It's just gratitude and those things that kind of keep you centered. And when you don't, you kind of drift away. It makes things more difficult.

But this is a difficult time in wrestling. There's a lot of media coverage and hype and all those different things that you can feed into it or not. Just makes it more difficult. But they both did a great job.

Aaron, obviously, just very dominant all year long. Carter had some adversity, which is pretty amazing. He wasn't able to wrestle the way he wanted to, but wrestling with the injury that he had was really, really impressive. There's not

a lot of human beings on the planet that would be able to do what he just did, obviously.

Q. Last year in this press conference you said wrestling is just a game. How and when did you develop that mentality?

CAEL SANDERSON: It's always been a game. That's just the way I was raised. You want to win every game we play. If it's at home, you're playing video games or you're playing whatever you're playing, you're trying to win.

And it is a game. I mean, all you have to do is look back 20 years and who can tell us -- maybe you guys can because that's what you do for a living -- but it doesn't matter. Life moves forward and this is just all about preparation and getting ready for the next stage in life.

And with that perspective, you can compete a little bit more freely. It's just the truth. You don't have to look hard to realize that sports aren't that important. We love them and they give us purpose. We learn a lot of really valuable things out of them, but first and foremost is character.

And you have kids that don't reach their goals in wrestling and sometimes that can be the best thing for them in their life. You just never know. It's up to them and what they decide to do with the next stage.

Or you can have somebody that wins and they want to ride that wave. And that wave, it fades quickly and you've got to move on to the next thing. It's just a game, but it's fun to win when you play games.

Q. With Mitchell, was there some confusion there at the end? Did he know that the riding time point was secured?

CAEL SANDERSON: I think he thought he was going into overtime. So he kind of just shut it down a little bit. But that obviously falls on me as the coach and not communicating that to him.

But great opponent. He wrestled an awesome match, and he's got a really bright future ahead of him. So we're excited for him.

Q. You grew up in the Gable dynasty era. How satisfying is it to now have that similar status? You've done almost everything that the Iowa program has done.

CAEL SANDERSON: I'm not worried about that stuff. When I got to college, he was retired -- I think the year when I was a senior in high school. But obviously I know a

lot about Coach Gable and the dominance they had and the excellence of the program. And they still have that excellence.

But we're doing our thing. We don't worry about and try to compare ourselves to others. And we're just going to be the best we can be. As a staff, we're here trying to figure out what we can do better and how we can have our guys better prepared because things continue to change. The game continues to change. And that's what makes it fun.

That's how you stay motivated, and you don't start thinking about next year tomorrow. We're thinking about next year three, four years ago. That's just the way it is.

And I don't remember what your question was, I'm sorry. But we just have a great staff. I love working with Coach Casey Cunningham and Coach Cody. And Coach Kennedy has done an awesome job.

Again, I don't want to compare. I don't know any other staffs but there's a lot of great staffs. There's a lot of great people in this sport. And they work hard and do a fantastic job. But we're really grateful to have those guys to go to work with every day.

Q. What did you think of Levi and Greg? They were second place last year. Now they're at the top of the podium. (Indiscernible) did this season and getting back to where I guess they wanted to be all season long?

CAEL SANDERSON: I think they both, they wrestled great. They had that experience and they were the aggressors and kind of went out there and got their takedowns against two really good opponents. I'm really happy for them. And the trick is just keep getting better and let's get ready for another one.

Q. Some people might say State College is the center of the wrestling universe -- what you've done here in this tournament, you've got the trials coming up. There's a lot of attention in wrestling in that area. What has the impact that you're having in that state? I know it's a strong wrestling state, but what does it say about the future?

CAEL SANDERSON: We're not saying that. We are just going to do what we do every day and keep trying to get better and improve as we move along.

We have a lot of support. We have the best athletic director in the country right now, and we're very blessed with Pat Kraft. He loves the sport. He's extremely competitive. It's been a huge just refresh.



But Pennsylvania has always been known for wrestling. It's been great. It's just been a nice combination for us to be able to get in there. But there's a lot of states that love wrestling. There's a lot of great wrestlers around the world, around the country. But we're just blessed to be surrounded by a lot of good people that love competing and love doing things the right way.

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