

# 2025 NCAA Wrestling Championship

Wednesday, March 19, 2025

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA

Wells Fargo Center

**AJ Ferrari**

**Carter Starocci**

**Keegan O'Toole**

**Gable Steveson**

Media Conference



THE MODERATOR: We're joined by student-athletes Carter Starocci from Penn State, Gable Steveson from Minnesota and Keegan O'Toole from Missouri.

CARTER STAROCCI: I'm Carter Starocci. I go to Penn State. And I'm looking forward to having a good weekend.

GABLE STEVESON: I'm Gable Steveson.

KEEGAN O'TOOLE: I'm Keegan O'Toole.

**Q. Gable, you made the decision to come back, do the college thing. What's it been like for you as far as, was it what you thought it would be like coming back to college? And have you really enjoyed the process of doing this final year here?**

GABLE STEVESON: First of all, I feel great. Best season overall my mind and body focus just coming back and being with the guys after leaving in 2022 and taking two years off. It was a hard thing. Just coming back, giving them that leeway to what it takes to be something great in this sport, it was definitely a big thing. And I'm happy I did it. I feel really good and I think this is a blessing for me and for the team, leading on into the future too.

**Q. Keegan, how is your health? What did you learn in December with your match with Levi Haines?**

KEEGAN O'TOOLE: My health is as good as it will be for the time being. My match in December was just, it was a fight. That's all that I learned and obviously it's something I need to go back and look at. Overall it made me stronger mentally, and this tournament is probably the most (indiscernible).

**Q. Gable, how do you all feel about the president being here?**

GABLE STEVESON: How I feel about President Donald Trump being here is a great thing. Regardless who the president is I think it's a great factor that he comes to support wrestling. Whoever it is and wherever it may be we're going to put on a show for him. Him showing up Saturday night to watch some of the best wrestling on earth, and we're going to give that to him.

**Q. Carter, your thoughts on the president, wrestling in front of him?**

CARTER STAROCCI: He came to the nationals, I believe, my sophomore year. It was really cool. He's obviously a big fan of combat sports. He's at all the UFC events. I think it's good for our sport. Like Gable said, he'll watch the best wrestling on earth. We're going to give it to him.

**Q. You guys met him already in October, right?**

CARTER STAROCCI: He came to Penn State.

**Q. Can you talk about the influence you have still -- that Gary has on you, your coaches back then?**

CARTER STAROCCI: That's everything. That's how I'm brought up and things like that. For me that's just, I started wrestling when I was 3 years old. I got brought up at a very young age.

For me, it's in my roots, it's always played a big part. And when I was younger a lot of our training was hard and tough and challenging. It was kind of what I still bring to the table today.

**Q. All of you have had long illustrious careers at your respective institutions. What keeps the tournament fresh and exciting for you year after year?**

CARTER STAROCCI: For me, it's never really about the tournament or just year after year for me, I just really love dominating. And for me that's kind of a big reason why I chose to come back this year was obviously last year,



dealing with the injury and things like that.

And it wasn't the way I wanted to finish up. So now I'm looking to finish this thing off the way I intended to, healthy and stuff and dominant.

GABLE STEVESON: Pretty much the same answer as Carter. Want to finish off the tournament in dominating fashion. I did it for a long time. I can do it again. And I think this year I'm going to do it in such a way that people aren't even going to fathom what I'm about to do.

But I let the wrestling speak for itself. But I'm happy to be here. Grateful for the opportunity. It's a big tournament.

And the main reason why I came back was to help the Minnesota team and put them in a good spot. And now it's time to put them in a good spot leading them into next year and giving them the best show they can ever see.

KEEGAN O'TOOLE: (Indiscernible) got another shot in five years to do it. I don't see why anyone wouldn't take that opportunity. It's exciting to be here.

Wrestling down on those mats, they're a lot better than any Big 12 mats or anything like that. They're just nice and saturated in color. They're (indiscernible). Pretty fun to be out there, especially when the crowd goes crazy. I'm looking forward to it.

**Q. Has it settled in for you guys that this is your final tournament?**

CARTER STAROCCI: It's not my final tournament. I'll always be competing (indiscernible). So for me it's not necessarily this is my last time. It's really not -- all this stuff I practiced for and there's always the next time. That's something I hope to -- (indiscernible). It's not about wrestling our opponents now, it's about wrestling for the next time and making sure we wrestle again. And if you take that mindset it will help you in life too.

GABLE STEVESON: I don't think this is all of our last time, (indiscernible) year for all of us.

Kind of going off what he said, if you all see me competing til I die, take me the hell off the mat before that. That's too long for me. Like I said, I'm happy to be here. I'm going to compete, have a great time and put a smile on my face and let the crowd see that we're happy to be here too.

KEEGAN O'TOOLE: All good things come to an end. We're kind of at the end, us three out here. But we're going to be competing in the future. On top of that it's a little bit bittersweet but we have five matches to wrestle. Not

thinking about that too much.

**Q. Gable, what's been your view what Penn State has done over the last three years -- 12 years (indiscernible)?**

GABLE STEVESON: I think it's fantastic. What Cael has done for the program is mindboggling. Seeing a coach bring a group of guys together and dominate a collegiate sport is crazy.

It reminds me just like Alabama football or Coach K at Duke basketball -- just taking over a game and (indiscernible).

And just watching that from a third person while being here and wrestling against a lot of his guys it's crazy to see. Shout out to them. And I think they're looking to break the team point record again this year, which is going to be a crazy thing. If they can keep doing that that's a cool thing.

Fantastic to -- just hard to put words on what he's done what. And what this guy has done, too, leading into his fifth national title, fourth straight. If he -- when he wins Saturday night, he's going to go out there and be a five-time national champion. It's going to blow the world up. Shout-out to him and shout-out to Penn State.

KEEGAN O'TOOLE: I think it's extremely impressive. Obviously we're always trying to beat him. But, again, they've proven that they're on top and so it's just -- yeah, you draw parallels with Coach Saban at Alabama. It's a dynasty.

**Q. For all of you, you all started with the programs you represent, great ambassadors for the programs. I wanted to (indiscernible) starting at the school you started with and the thoughts in the wrestling world and this crazy portal and NIL?**

GABLE STEVESON: This is a great time for all collegiate sports. Guys that are going after big NIL deals and buying fancy cars. (Indiscernible) Sanders and all those guys living luxurious lives.

I think it's cool for athletes to go out and get what they deserve and get their checks in and cash them too. It's the same thing with us. We're going to go out there and handle business and take care of everything that needs to be taken care of.

I think the angle for a lot of us is how can we live a better life instead of just living day to day. It's a big step for all of us, and I think it's a great thing. And I'm happy that we're accumulating what we're accumulating, and hopefully it



keeps going for everybody else.

KEEGAN O'TOOLE: It's kind of a crazy world out there just seeing everything that's happening over the years. I love where I started. I love -- built a lot of relationships and happy with those over just people and things like that. Not that that's important. But at the same time I met my wife at Columbia, that type of thing is more important than money.

CARTER STAROCCI: I think it's one of the biggest experiences for me. It's one of the things the program does really well on.

As far as NIL goes, I think that's something that's really great for all sports, especially wrestling, I think it's something that it should continue to grow.

And I think for as far as that, I think with management and things like that, I feel like we need to get some things going on their end to make sure that wrestling is getting more access and more eyes and things like that and kind of having a little more open mind and not having like the wrestling sport be a grind, and we love wrestling. It's always going to be about that. But I think it's a good way to make sure that we open more doors for the future.

AJ FERRARI: I think it's growing at a great rate excited for the future of wrestling and wrestling is growing and going to take over sports in the future. I think we need to embrace big personalities like myself big matches.

And I think at the end of the day growing our sport is going to be key to have good personalities that show themselves.

**Q. Keegan, going all the way back to the beginning of your college career, you've been in very deep competitive weight classes every time. Talk about the challenge it takes for you not only to be competitive but to be the best against the kind of opponents you have had to do every single year?**

KEEGAN O'TOOLE: I think you look at a guy like Joe Gross (phonetic) who was on top for so long, (indiscernible) about evolution. Obviously if it ain't broke don't fix it. But the attitude (indiscernible) mentally, physically.

Just throughout the time I've been wrestling college, I've obviously been in some wars with really good wrestlers. (Indiscernible) five times in college and those battles made me so much better.

And so honestly just having a growth mindset is something we talk about between me and Coach Dom. Also small group leaders, I was always hungry, never satisfied. That's

kind of my mentality through not only wrestling but life. Continually improving mentally and physically, understanding it's a process, doesn't mean you didn't make improvements.

**Q. Carter, can you put into words what these three days mean to you for your career, how you want to be remembered as a college wrestler?**

CARTER STAROCCI: For me it's not necessarily about these next three days. I feel like your career isn't just based on a three-day span. I think it's about going out there every single time you have the chance to compete, no matter if you're sick or hurt, just putting it all on the line. I feel it's something I've done every single time.

As far as all the other stuff, I mean, for me just, like I said, it's just about dominating. It's not just about winning and things like that. These next three days are another opportunity for me to go out and do that and prove that I'm the best.

It's one thing to be the best whether it's one year, two years, but it's another thing to be the best for half a decade, not only yourself and it's your team.

I feel a lot of times I get asked, you have a target on your back, this and that, but for me that's the whole way around. For us, we always are the guys hunting. That's how we approach it.

**Q. AJ, what's it like for you to be back first time in a couple years. Is it a new lease on life or same old, same old?**

AJ FERRARI: Same old, same old. Business is business. Here to perform, show out. Here for me to have fun, embrace the spotlight. I love performing, wrestling at the highest level. Show them the best. Win the national title at 197 and win two, three more.

I want to cement my legacy, have fun, give God all the glory. Super grateful for all the support I have all throughout the world. A lot of prayers, big support system is why I'm here.

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