

# 2025 NCAA Wrestling Championship

Friday, March 21, 2025

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA

Wells Fargo Center

## Carter Starocci

### Semifinals Media Conference



184 Lbs

THE MODERATOR: We welcome Carter Starocci, who won tonight with a victory of 9-3 tonight. Carter?

CARTER STAROCCI: No opening statement. Just always ready to go, like I always am.

**Q. Carter, you wrestled Parker Keckeisen, who you'll see in the finals, earlier in the year in exhibition. What did you feel from him then, and what are you expecting?**

CARTER STAROCCI: First of all, what a great event by FloWrestling, be able to have an event like that, obviously in my hometown.

I think it's always important. I think it's something that the other top guys, they need to put their foot out there. You get high-level competition. And for me, I'll see him again.

As far as what I take from that match, I mean, he's obviously a tough kid, but to be a national champ, it takes a lot more than toughness. So we will find out tomorrow night.

**Q. Carter, now that you are one match away from potentially achieving your goal, what's it going to be like for you for the next 24 hours?**

CARTER STAROCCI: For me, always thanking God and being grateful for the moment. That's what I always try to do before my match, during my match, after my match, is anytime I get the thought, to make sure that goes through.

Obviously, I will have to get my weight down tonight. That's the wrestling process right there.

But for me it's no different, what goes through my mind. For me, when that whistle blows, you've got to turn the kill switch on. And whoever is out there in front of you, that's who you've got to take out.

That's my mind-set. And for me, that's easy to do. Doing the media stuff, getting the weight cut, going to practice, sitting around all day, for me, I get to watch my teammates because a lot of my teammates are going before me. So that is exciting.

But also have to stay cool and collected. So that whole process, it feels like you're chained up. And that's almost the hard part. And when you are out there wrestling, that's the easy part. I can do that all day long.

**Q. What's the Friday night weight-cut process like for you at 184 compared to what it was every other you've been here at 174?**

CARTER STAROCCI: It's about the same. I'm cutting a good amount of weight. I think in the years prior, maybe I was leaner, and so my body was fighting against it a little bit.

It's always tough. But for me, I use those moments because it helps you dial in, you know what I mean? When you're getting the weight off and things like that, it gives you a little edge and gives you a mental peace, like I'm doing all this, not just to make the weight, I'm going out there to smash your face in.

So just kinda using all that emotion, all that training, all the hard work, all the dedication. I don't want to say sacrifice because I feel like when you sacrifice something it means you're giving up something, and for me I'm not giving up anything. This is what I want to do.

**Q. You had a dominant performance in the semifinals. What has allowed you to create that separation between you and the pack?**

CARTER STAROCCI: I think a lot of it is trusting my instincts, trusting my coaches and teammates and utilizing their knowledge and experience. Outside of that, always looking to score more points, looking for the offense and putting on these guys.

And you realize, too, like I noticed that college wrestling is I



think easier than high school wrestling, and even years prior, because college wrestling, there's a lot of girls in the stands, and then even afterwards there's a lot of drugs. I mean, there is everything you can find. I feel like a lot of guys, you know what I mean, it takes a little bit more to turn that stuff down.

As you get older, it's that knock on the door that says, hey, are you going to get a job? What are you going to do? If your girlfriend wants to move in, you gotta pay bills. So life comes at you. I feel like a lot of guys feel that pressure and they go different ways. So at this level, there're only a few guys that are all in, and honestly I'm one of those guys.

**Q. Carter, you're already one of the all-time greats with four titles. What would five mean to you, to be the only one to do that in Division I?**

CARTER STAROCCI: For me it means nothing. It's here tomorrow, then it's gone the next day, and then it's about the next group and the next group. Last year the build-up was, hey, it'll be the first time in Penn State history, one of the greatest programs ever across all sports.

And something that Coach Cael not only preaches to me, but also to I think his own kids and our team, is that all this stuff is cool and important, but when you look at it in a huge lens, 50 years from now, oh, like, am I that guy? I remember one time I was a five-time national champ. Oh, cool, but what are you doing now today?

It's just something that comes along. And I'm not going to downplay the opportunity, obviously I'm here doing it so it obviously means a lot to me. But for the five-time national champ itself, to me it has no meaning. You can take the Penn State wrestling championship logo away, take the name away, take you guys away, put whoever is in front of me, and I'm ready to go. And for me, that's why I do it.

**Q. Carter, obviously this season has been about the drive for five. I'm just curious what the team dynamic has been like with that. Is it like a baseball pitcher going for the perfect game, like nobody mentions it to you?**

CARTER STAROCCI: I don't think anybody cares. Our group of guys, we have so many guys at a really high, high level. And I think when you get to that high level, you have to be a certain level of focused. I think all of us, we're focused on the team and the team is first, but how to help your team is helping yourself and taking care of yourself.

And obviously, too, even with that, we have the greatest wrestler to ever walk the earth as our head coach. So I could win five titles, six, seven, eight. When you look at

Coach Cael Sanderson he's the guy always. That will always humble you up real quick.

**Q. When is the last time somebody brought that up on the team, the drive for five?**

CARTER STAROCCI: I don't think that's ever been a conversation for the team, honestly.

**Q. What does it mean to you to be part of a team that has had 10 All-Americans?**

CARTER STAROCCI: It's awesome. I think that's a true testament to every single kid in the lineup, all the way from 125 in Luke Lilledahl as a true freshman, and to see his growth.

I remember when he took that -- I don't even want to say loss versus Rutgers. It was the kid that kind of ran the whole match and got a takedown, and that's not a real win. But for him when those things happen and you see how guys respond and how their energy is the next day at practice, and he was a guy that was picking everyone's brain. And for him, he's going to be well off.

And Braeden has had two great seasons, and he's going to finish it off this weekend. And Beau Bartlett has been at the top for a while. And Van Ness, he's a great competitor. And Tyler Kasak, one of the strongest dudes on the team pound for pound. Mitch, he's a monster.

And Levi Haines. My dad calls him the Amish Assassin. He's a real killer, and he doesn't care too much about anything else besides his family, hunting, and wrestling. He's a monster too.

And then you got Josh Barr, a freshman that's been dominating. And then Greg.

I think being a part of this team is always special, and our coaching staff, and even guys, too, our practice partners, those guys are in the trenches I would say a lot more than we are because they do all the grunt work and the work that no one wants to do. It's one thing getting up at 6 a.m. in the morning and having to cut weight and go through the motions, but you get to be out there competing, and those guys are up, and that's it. They just kind of work us out.

So a big shout out to everyone that's involved.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Carter.

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