

# 2025 NCAA Wrestling Championship

Saturday, March 22, 2025

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA

Wells Fargo Center

## Carter Starocci

Finals Media Conference



184 pounds

Carter Starocci (Penn State) d. Parker Keckeisen (Northern Iowa), 4-3

**Q. Back when you came to Penn State, on that first day, if Cael told you at the end of it all you would be a five-time national champion, with your last one in a new weight class against a defending national, especially on a team with 10 All-Americans in one season, what would you have said?**

CARTER STAROCCI: I would have said, you're damn right.

**Q. You spoke in the past about how difficult it can be sometimes stepping on the mat with guys that won't engage with you. Obviously Parker, a really high-level guy. How much has it helped you grow and improve knowing you could face a guy that can really push you?**

CARTER STAROCCI: I think that's one of the blessings of going to Penn State University. You have really high-level guys. One of my old teammates wrestled him a few times and he beat him for a national title. We have almost every single look in the room possible.

Obviously we have the greatest wrestler of all time in Coach Cael Sanderson and all of our coaches too. Having that alone, I think that piece alone already separates you. And add in everything else, and you've got to go out there and have the will to win.

**Q. You've downplayed this moment a lot, said there are bigger things ahead in your life. Now that the moment's here, could you describe your emotion, what it means to you?**

CARTER STAROCCI: It means a lot to me, but as for me, I never want to downplay the moment, but I mean it's always cool but one thing that Coach Cael really instills in

us this is all just preparation for the next thing, you know what I mean?

In God's eyes, I don't think he looks at anyone different if you're national champ or not. I feel he kind of goes off your character and who you are as a person. All this is just preparation for that.

I mean, it's important because obviously I'm here doing it and I love to do it. But I think it ends at that. I don't think it's anything more or anything less.

**Q. You said you're obviously not done wrestling, but you're now done wrestling in the NCAA. What do you want your legacy to be on the league and the team, Penn State Nittany Lions?**

CARTER STAROCCI: I think just a guy that always led by example, always showed up, no matter the day, if you're hurt, injured, sad, no matter what, always putting your best foot forward. That's something I want the younger guys on the team to keep pushing for more and more and more and just keep that Penn State dynasty going.

I'm not sure how much longer these coaches got, but I know Coach Cael pretty well. If there's some kind of coaching record or record out there, you guys figure it out. I'm sure when he breaks that, he'll be done.

**Q. Now that your college career is over, five national titles, three Big Ten titles, more than four years without losing a match, not counting Big Tens last year when you were hurt. Where do you put yourself on that list of all-time greats in the sport?**

CARTER STAROCCI: Obviously as a competitor, when you toe the line, I believe I'm the baddest dude out there. But in real terms, just Coach Cael Sanderson, I think it's one thing to go out there and do it, but I think it takes a whole other level of understanding and knowledge and things like that to get other people to do what you know how to do.

And he coached four-time men's state champ, an Olympic champ. He's coached everything that he's done. When

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you are to replicate that that's something that's going to live on forever, where something that, five national titles, I feel something like that, it comes and goes. But he really marked this thing. I think he's the greatest of all time.

**Q. Now that it's over, do you have any plans at all to celebrate? I'm also curious, what was Cael Sanderson's maybe message to you during the day or did he say anything to you afterwards?**

CARTER STAROCCI: I think his message was right from the whistle, let's go out there and get on him and let them know that this match is yours. I think this is just something that's just philosophy. Something big for him, it's going out there, having fun.

For me, I've been in this moment so many times year after year. You kind of have that experience and understand what to do.

But honestly, though, I mean I know it's five-time champ, but it's really just another match. You know what I mean? Like they say, there's the U.S. Open and all types of other stuff. It's always about the next one.

**Q. Can you talk a little bit about the scoring sequence there? You convert to the double. He grabs that ankle. You have to worry about him going for that leg pass but also maybe a stalemate if he holds onto that ankle too long. How were you able to convert that shot?**

CARTER STAROCCI: It wouldn't be a stalemate because when I had him in a double leg, I heard Coach Casey say it's danger. When he said that, I forgot about that. I peeked over my shoulder and I saw his back was close to the mat.

At that point I started threatening danger more, so the ref started counting danger and that made him adjust his hips and balance a little more. As soon as he shifted that's when I made the adjustment and got the takedown.

But as far as it's a leg-passing sequence. That's wrestling, I've been in those positions. You feel it.

There's no really set answer on what to do because every single time you're out there, every single second it's always going to be a little different. That's why you practice every single day. It's your intuition takes over you feel those things.

**Q. You said before, you don't get -- this is just another match. By the same token you've done something today that nobody else has done. How is that mindset,**

**not trying to get too high or putting too much pressure on yourself, helped you during your career and helped you get to where you are? And also why weren't you out there for The Parade of All-Americans?**

CARTER STAROCCI: The first question you said -- what was your first question?

**Q. I'm asking too many here, but I'm just curious, you said you treated this like any other match -- for a lot of people...**

CARTER STAROCCI: It is another match. I think we all have jobs and roles. Your guys' job and role is to make stories and hype things up. That's your job. My job is to go out there and perform. My job isn't necessarily your job. Your guys' is to hype it up. But a guy like me you're not going to hype up.

I stay focused on the task at hand. I do my job and that's what I'm out there to do. And that's just what it is.

And as far as the other question, as far as the Parade of Champions, I was the first match up. I'm not sure why ESPN elected for the 184-pound match to be the first one. You've got a guy going for his fifth title, and you have the reigning champ. I think whoever wins that match is the Hodge Trophy winner.

We've been dominant all year, you put that match first. For whatever, ESPN, whatever, just makes me laugh and giggle because some rules that wrestling has in place, things like that, it's no surprise on why wrestling isn't mainstream.

That's for you guys to figure it out. You're the ones that can have influence on that. I think you have to look yourselves in the mirror and ask yourselves questions.

**Q. You wrestled so much of your life in Pennsylvania. What's it feel like to end it here, end your collegiate career in your home state?**

CARTER STAROCCI: It's pretty cool. I didn't really put it together until before we came out here. Someone told me that.

I'm from Pennsylvania. Obviously wanted to go to Penn State. Ended it in Pennsylvania. For me it's really cool. Having it in Philadelphia, I have a lot of family and friends and things like that. I mean, it means a lot. I love Pennsylvania. I've been here my whole life. It couldn't mean more.

**Q. We've talked all about you. But what's it mean to**

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**win another team title? You guys go out and get your fourth straight and 12th of the Cael era?**

CARTER STAROCCI: Just this team's really, really rock-solid from start to finish. I think that our leadership and all of our coaches and guys, I mean, we still have guys like Aaron that's helping out and Coach and things like that.

I feel when you have that group of guys and that level of experience, it always makes it fun and exciting and things like that.

We have a guy that's a sophomore in the NCAA Finals and our other finalist is a freshman. That pretty much tells you kind of where the program is going. We have some young guys making noise. I think our coaches are going to keep leaning in that direction.

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