

Clemson's Carter aims for 'legend' status

By Ian Taylor
Dec 26, 2023

CLEMSON — Clemson linebacker Barrett Carter has accomplished a lot in his three years with the Tigers.

Stepping into the starting lineup as a sophomore and earning All-ACC and All-America honors from Phil Steele and following it up with more All-ACC selections this past season as a junior, Carter has racked up 148 tackles, 20.5 for a loss, 8.5 sacks, two forced fumbles and a pair of interceptions across 37 games. It's a career that has seen an ACC championship and enough success that many players in his position would feel fulfilled before heading off to the NFL.



Clemson linebacker Barrett Carter chases down a Duke ball carrier during the Tigers' season-opening loss to the Blue Devils earlier this year in Durham, N.C.

Photo by Caleb Gilbert

But Carter surprised many on Dec. 7 with a social media post addressing Clemson fans. Conditioned by other players' announcements from years past, some could have mistaken it for a good-bye, but instead, it was Carter announcing his return.

"The opportunity's right there in front of you and you have a tough decision to make, but you got to really weigh out the pros and the cons," he said on Tuesday. "I felt like I have some unfinished business here, I feel like I left a lot of meat on the bone this past year, I came here to win a national championship."

"It was in my best interest — selfishly — to come back. I love this university, I love this team, I love these people and I couldn't leave yet."

Weighing those pros and cons turned out to be more difficult than Carter had imagined, saying he only found "clarity" two days before his announcement after a conversation with Dan Lian, an associate pastor at NewSpring Church.

"He just said, 'Don't make a decision based off of fear,' and that was exactly what I needed to hear," Carter said.

Among those he spoke to during the process was teammate Jeremiah Trotter Jr., the Tigers' other star third-year linebacker who did opt to move on to the NFL, and Jeremiah Trotter Sr. The elder Trotter, who spent years in the NFL as a linebacker, told Carter to follow his heart and to not look back on whatever decision he made.

"Just go attack everything head on and don't say, 'Oh, I should have done this,' or 'I should have done that,'" Carter said he was told. "Whatever you decide to do, just face that head on and go with it and don't look back."

It helped that Carter hadn't come to Clemson with a pre-planned notion of going to the NFL after three years. He said that it was always about taking the best opportunity that presented itself. However, when that opportunity presented itself this year, he wasn't in love with it.

Aside from leaving "meat on the bone," Carter said he wasn't thrilled with the feedback he received from NFL scouts.

"I was hearing a lot of different things," he said. "The main thing is I know what I'm capable of. I felt like I would be selling myself short if I were to leave this year."

"He's got a chance to be a top-15, top-20 pick, and he's not that this year," Clemson coach Dabo Swinney said. "He's a guy that's on everybody's radar. No question, he'd get drafted, but he's one of those kids that wants to finish."

Swinney said that while he believed Carter wouldn't have chosen to come back if he thought he would be a first-round pick, the linebacker had other things on his mind that kept him at Clemson.

Carter said he wanted to be a "legend" at Clemson, and to do that, he needs to stay another year. On the one hand, he feels he hasn't let it all out on the field, while his off-the-field role will be what defines him in his eyes.

"I came back to finish. I came back to show my teammates that I'm worthy of being a captain and lead them to the promised land," he said, noting former teammates like James Skalski, Baylon Spector and Mario Goodrich. "I want to be the next one of those, and I want to be a legend at this school. I think when you earn that status of being a captain, you earn that trust from your teammates, you've reached that point."

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