

Sweet victory



Clemson head coach Dabo Swinney, right, and his wife Kathleen and youngest son Clay wave to fans from the back of a car during the Tigers' national championship parade on Saturday in Clemson.

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Tigers celebrate another national championship

BY ALEX MAMINAKIS
THE JOURNAL

CLEMSON — Even the frigid temperatures and a short bout of sleet couldn't put a damper on the Clemson Tigers' national championship celebration on Saturday morning in Death Valley.

The Tigers rode through downtown Clemson and then through campus in their second championship parade in three years as thousands of fans filled the streets and Memorial Stadium to celebrate their beloved champions.

For the last time this season — and for some players, the last time ever — the Tigers entered Memorial Stadium down The Hill and celebrated their 44-16 College Football Playoff National Championship win over Alabama to finish the season a perfect 15-0.

"This is definitely special — getting to the mountaintop, everything we've worked so hard for," senior defensive tackle Christian Wilkins said on stage to the large crowd in attendance. "Not just these four years and the team this year, but we all worked our whole lives to get to this point. It's great to see it all come to fruition and to get to that mountaintop, for sure. But the thing is, it's not really about the mountaintop moments — it's really always about the journey. And I could not ask for a better group of people behind me to experience this journey with."

A select group of team leaders followed Wilkins in addressing the crowd Saturday, ending with coach Dabo Swinney, and they each reflected on how special a season this one was, but also on how special their time at Clemson has been to

them, personally.

Senior running back Adam Choice faced plenty of adversity as a Tiger, from suffering knee injuries early in his career to losing his friend and former running back teammate C.J. Fuller this past fall, who Choice mentioned on Saturday morning.

But the senior has nothing but appreciation for his time as a Tiger.

"My career didn't go the way I wanted it to, but I'm here standing before you as a team captain. And that just shows a lot about this team," Choice said. "It doesn't matter what you do on the field — what you do off the field, how you lead, how you become and develop into a man, and that's what I'm most appreciative of as my time at

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Clemson has come to a close."

When junior defensive end Clelin Ferrell, who has already announced his intentions to go pro, stepped up to the microphone Saturday, he pointed to his mother in the crowd and asked for everyone to give her a round of applause.

He then said he did that because his mother taught him about family, and family was a major reason he chose to come to Clemson in the first place.

"The biggest thing is family, and that's what we have here," Ferrell said. "My time here at Clemson has come to an end, but I'm not going to miss Death Valley — I'm going to miss the people that fill this stadium up and had it rocking on Saturdays. I'm not going to miss just winning the championship — I'm going to miss the people that I won it with. Regardless of whatever you do in life, it's all about the people who you do it with."

The 2018 Clemson Tigers are a special team, and

they have already cemented their place in history as the first in modern college football to finish a season 15-0 — Penn also did it in 1897.

Swinney has coached some special players and teams in his 10 years as the Tigers' head coach, but he made a point on Saturday of singling out this year's group and how great they truly are.

"I want to thank this team. I tell them all the time — greatness is not your destiny, it's a decision that you have to make. And this team

made a decision to be great," Swinney said. "It's not your right to be great, you're not entitled to be great — it's a decision that you have to make, and this team made that decision. They were special from day one. It doesn't take long to get around this bunch, and you'll know what I'm talking about.

"The leadership, the focus, the commitment and the will to win was special."

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Clemson seniors Hunter Renfrow, left, and Christian Wilkins enjoy riding in the team's national championship parade on Saturday in Clemson.