

2023 NCAA Wrestling Championship

Friday, March 22, 2024

Kansas City, Missouri, USA

T-Mobile Center

Drake Ayala

Semifinals Media Conference



THE MODERATOR: We have with us the 125 Championship, Drake Ayala. Drake, can you give us some comments?

DRAKE AYALA: I mean, I got it done, when it matters most. Wasn't pretty, but sometimes that's what you gotta do. I'm truly blessed to be in this situation, be healthy and have the best people surrounding me right now.

Q. Earlier this year I asked you what word or phrase you'd say for this 125 weight class. You said "mine". Why would you have had so much confidence then?

DRAKE AYALA: I said this in probably every interview ever, but I know what I'm capable of, and I know how good I can be and how good I am. I just have to prove it in March and now I'm here in the finals and you guys understand why I said that.

Q. Drake, you keep the Iowa finalist streak alive, is that something that goes through your mind going into that match? What were your thoughts on keeping that going?

DRAKE AYALA: Awesome, you know, we're going to have two finalists. So Mikey is going to get his.

Q. Tom and Terry got that one started. What was their message to you headed into that one, as well?

DRAKE AYALA: That was the last thing we were going to talk about. They didn't say anything about that with me.

Q. Drake, great match. You guys have wrestled a couple times. Obviously the first time this year you were supposed to wrestle, you didn't wrestle in the duel. There was a duck emoji. You look at the Iowa Twitter right now it says "duck duck finalist". How much fuel to the fire did that after you sat out of that duel?

DRAKE AYALA: I don't know why he said that, I'm the last

person to duck or whatever, but I have respect for all these guys. They're some tough dudes out here.

Q. Drake, Richie is going to be your opponent in the finals. How excited are you for the finals and what do you expect in the match against Richie?

DRAKE AYALA: We wrestled twice my senior year in high school, we were one and one. So it's going to be a rubber match for our childhood dreams, how's that?

Q. Drake, I was hoping you could describe your career. Considering two years ago you were not going to wrestle as a true freshman, you did and then last year you redshirted. What was that part of the journey like for you?

DRAKE AYALA: Yeah, my journey has been different. I have struggled through some things that a lot of people don't know about these last two years. At the end of the day it doesn't matter. It doesn't matter to my opponents, so it doesn't matter and I'm here and I'm grateful to be here with this opportunity and I've gotta finish it off tomorrow.

Q. In the third period, you chose to go neutral and look at your offense a little bit, that's been this tournament. Pretty big for you getting the major decision in the tech ball. How good are you feeling about that right now and your offense and how you're getting to it?

DRAKE AYALA: Yeah, like I said, when I wrestle like Drake Ayala I open up, man, I'm hard to beat. So I gotta keep doing that. I might have shelled up a little bit there in the third period but it is what it is. Going to the finals tomorrow night.

Q. Drake, the first time you wrestled in the Big 10 you beat him 8-1, this time 3-2, what was he doing that wasn't allowing you to get to your shots or some other game plan that you had?

DRAKE AYALA: To be honest, I took him down right away in the first -- I took him down in the first in the Big Ten match, and then he put himself to his back, so I got some



back points there. And I scored one takedown there, and I scored one takedown this time.

Q. Y'all sat there in the first period as you mentioned that takedown that goes to review for several minutes. How do you keep your composure and come back and wrestle your match?

DRAKE AYALA: I have the best coaches in the country, in the world, really, and Terry is always like -- and they were like hey you're not going to get this, so be ready to go. I didn't hesitate. I didn't think I was going to get it. I know I had both legs corralled, and I fought him off, and they didn't give me points. Kinda surprised there. I mean it made sense, why I got the call, but I had to be ready for everything.

Q. Drake in past conversations Richie said Brandon Courtney was like a brother to him. I'm curious if you have a similar relationship with Spencer Lee?

DRAKE AYALA: Me and Spencer Lee's relationship is different because we are competitors. I'm a competitor, and he's a competitor and it's not always sunshine and rainbows when you are competing for the same goal, right?

But me and Spencer have gotten close, and he's a ton of help. I have wrestled with him a lot this year, and I'm thankful to have a guy like that in the room and that I can look up to and ultimately compete against.

THE MODERATOR: Thanks, Drake.

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