

2023 NCAA Wrestling Championship

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Kansas City, Missouri, USA
T-Mobile Center

Vito Arujau

Semifinals Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: Here we have Vito Arujau the 133-pound Championship. Vito is from Cornell. If you could start us with general comments about your semifinal match.

VITO ARUJAU: Yeah, you know, I've been -- this is kind of the main point I guess I've been preaching this tournament. Last year I felt that it was a lot of my improvement at a mental stage in my preparation that really allowed me to shine. This year that was not the case.

This year was something that I've never really had to really fight through before. It was injuries, debilitating injuries that, you know, for some time I thought, you know, I wasn't going to be able to wrestle this season and it was really through Cornell, Cornell support system, the Cornell wrestling program, our alumni, our broad spectrum that allowed me to be able to stay in here today and compete the way that I usually do. I feel super, super blessed, super honored to have those people in my corner, whereas last year I think I would have accredited the work to me, to finally getting that next jump. I feel like this year is more than anything thanks to Cornell wrestling and the support staff with it.

Q. Could you explain at all what your health status was this year that limited you? And also, you are a World Champ for Freestyle. Was there any part of you that said the heck with this college stuff, and I'll just focus on Trials?

VITO ARUJAU: I will start with the second part. There was a lot of talk of the oldest person in the NCAA. I'm getting up in numbers, so I didn't want to redshirt and come back to it next year. So I wanted to kind of finish out my academic career and then allow myself that freedom to go into my, you know, professional career. Because I plan to wrestle many years after I finish this one right here.

As far as what my injuries actually were, I -- there was a number of them, right? I ended up first match of the season or second, whatever the first -- where I wrestled



Crookham for the first time, I sustained a pretty massive concussion which took me off the mat for close to a month. Returning back from that, when I got my concussion on my head, I injured some of the vertebrae in my neck and that was contributing to some neural pain going down my arm, which ultimately, you know, in the worst parts of it, wouldn't let me use my hand. I would lose complete feeling in my arm.

So it was a really stressful -- really something that I've never had to deal with was -- the pain I can work through, but my body just not working the way I wanted it to is something I've never really experienced.

Even in a mental place, it was very difficult to work through and thankfully through our alumni base and, like I said, our support staff, I was able to find the help that I needed. It was all to them. To the point where I had given up, and they wouldn't give up on me. So that's why I'm here today.

Q. You referenced last year and the level you reached. How did you reach such a high level last year and how close are you to the level that you were at last year?

VITO ARUJAU: Thankfully, I don't think that -- I think I'm a little out of practice, because like I said, I was on the mat, off the mat, on the mat, off the mat. So I really didn't get the amount of training that I'm used to.

So for that, I feel like I was a little rusty, even at EIWAs last weekend, I was rusty. My competition sense wasn't really there. I feel like taking that loss and especially where -- earlier in the season, I took a loss, but I was massively concussed and couldn't wrestle for close to a month after. So there was no follow-up to it. I had lost last weekend and there was some follow-up. There was two weeks of really good, focused training that I missed so much.

As far as what I did last year to this year, I hope I didn't really decay too much. If anything, I feel like as wrestlers, we face adversity and that makes us stronger, right? So I feel like this is me building up, on from what I did last year and knowing that I can do it no matter what.

Q. Vito, the first two times you wrestled Crookham, he

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took you down twice in the match and tonight you totally dominated. What was the biggest difference on the mat tonight from the first two times?

VITO ARUJAU: You know, I don't think I did -- you know, the wrestling community or Crookham any justice when I wrestled him. I don't think that he necessarily got -- the first time he got me coming off of a month off of wrestling after the World Championship, I was thinking I was going to walk through, do a couple opens. So I wasn't prepared. I didn't give him the respect that he deserved.

He is a God's honest good wrestler. You know, he's got some very bright future ahead of him, but I don't think that he necessarily met Vito on the mat until tonight, and that's what I think really happened.

Q. Vito, we talked yesterday and you talked about your injury and how you just weren't confident in what you do very well. How did that change tonight? What was your mindset going into the third match with Crookham knowing where your health was and where your mental state was?

VITO ARUJAU: I think the biggest thing that I had going for me this time around was I -- my physical state was not as nearly as fluctuant. I'm in a pretty stable place now and like I said before, that's all thanks to the Cornell support staff and Cornell Wrestling as a program.

But I'm at in a very decently stable place. I haven't wrestled in a long tournament like this in a while so I'm pretty sore. Besides that, I am feeling pretty good. That one big slam kinda got me a little bit. And then my knee, my knee healed up nicely from the finals of EIWA last week. But just coming into this match, it was a lot of, just, trying to do what I do best and that is allow the wrestling to happen. Don't force -- don't be scared, don't think, just go out there and wrestle. And in an aggressive manner, stay on it. Work through positions. These are all things that I do very well and it is what led to my success last year at NAAs, at the World Championships and again today and hopefully tomorrow as well.

Q. Was there anything that he does well that you focused on at all? Like I said, he's beaten you twice already. There's been a long time since you've had two losses to the same guy. Was there anything that you focused on that he does well that you knew you needed to stop in order to get your offense going?

VITO ARUJAU: Yeah, there was definitely some familiarity, at the very least. That one misdirection high-crotch shot is a very good shot. He got me with it on multiple occasions. For me, watching the whole set-up, I'm

like, this isn't going to get me and then he gets there and I'm like oh, dang! You know? You're referring to Crookham, correct? Sorry, I think I hit my head a little too hard.

He's got a gamey sense to him. He's waiting, he's watching, he's waiting for that perfect moment.

My game plan tonight was not to give it to him. It was to stay on the offense and just do what I do best. I don't need to -- my best way for me to "game plan" someone is to lean into things that I do very well and do those things very well.

THE MODERATOR: Thanks Vito.

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