

2023 NCAA Wrestling Championship

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T-Mobile Center

Austin Gomez

Semifinals Media Conference



THE MODERATOR: We have with us now in the 149-pound Championship, Austin Gomez from the University of Michigan. Austin, if you can get us started with some general comments?

AUSTIN GOMEZ: General comments is, you know, I'm right where I need to be, one match away. That match right there was just World Class technique. Kevin Jackson preaches to me, World Class, that's what you are. That's what I did.

Q. Austin, your decision to go to Michigan, a lot of people thought it was more because of the freestyle, which obviously you excelled at. How much did that actually help you with your college mentality, your folkstyle mentality?

AUSTIN GOMEZ: Both? If anything it helped my freestyle. These foreigners, they just wrestle in spurts, but this college season, these seven-minute matches it's a freaking grind, man. This college season is a grind. If anything it's helped me -- freestyle helped me with my -- I gotta make 65 kilos, which that's not fun doing that. So it's really helped me to keep my weight low and not having to cut no weight really at all for 149. So it's helped me in that aspect.

Q. You're coming right off a match, but we need to know what are you thinking about for tomorrow's match?

AUSTIN GOMEZ: Well, right now my main focus is I gotta get out of here and go cut some weight. Keep everything World Class. That's -- everything that KJ tells me before I go out there and wrestle or even like 30 minutes before I go out there and wrestle, he just says these dudes have nothing for you. They really don't. If I'm wrestling World Class and staying stingy on my offense, my defense, my hand fighting, these dudes really don't have anything for me.

Q. Take us through this journey. Iowa State,

concussions, Wisconsin, Michigan, making an Olympic team for Mexico. Take us through the journey and how you got to this point.

AUSTIN GOMEZ: It's been a lot of ups and downs. It's been a lot of adversity, starting at Iowa State and making the round of 12 hurt, losing in that, and then getting concussions, you know, set me back.

Mentally just wasn't there. My love for the sport went away and then of course what happened with my dad, that was a big thing, too, what I went through with him, because I also have a baby brother who passed away when I was 11. He was 14 weeks old.

So him going through that made me realize, like, I might not have any guys around me anymore with my dad and then my brother. Going through that and then ultimately retiring, I didn't love the sport anymore. My love for the sport went away, cutting down to 133 wasn't fun, not easy to do. And then going to Wisconsin, Bono and Reader and Gross were the right guys for me to get me back on my feet and putting that belief in myself that, you know, I do belong here. I do belong on this stage and now I'm in the National Finals, representing Michigan. It's been a long freaking journey, man. And I gotta thank my family and God for blessing me with these opportunities in my life.

Q. Austin, you talk about the love of sport, how did you get it back? What what helped? Sounds like you were burned out.

AUSTIN GOMEZ: Not doing anything for six months. I wasn't doing anything. I was graduating from Iowa State and then just -- I was done wrestling, wasn't really doing anything, I guess you could say I was living kind of a normal college lifestyle.

You know, it just -- I was getting fat, and I didn't like that, so I started working out again and, you know, after a month I started getting pretty lean and I was like, dang, maybe I can still do this. And my sister, Alexis, was at Grandview University at that time wrestling on their women's team. So I would meet up with her two or three times a week meet up with her over at Grandview and get some workouts in



and that's how it all started back up again.

Q. (No microphone.)

AUSTIN GOMEZ: After I decided I didn't want to take my last year, I focused on my freestyle career and I needed to be somewhere where there were guys around freestyle and Cliff Keen Wrestling Club is the best place for that. You have World and Olympic Gold Medalists in that room. And Kevin Jackson recruited me to Iowa State when I was 16, 17 years old and I've always had a good relationship with him, kept it for a long time and I knew that's who I wanted in my corner when I started achieving my goals.

Q. Talk about the match-up for tomorrow. Obviously you have to get your mind right, you gotta get your weight down, but what's the game plan going into tomorrow's match-up?

AUSTIN GOMEZ: I honestly don't know. I haven't watched too much of Caleb. I know he's tough as nails. So KJ will take care of that, tell me what I need to do and he will just tell me to keep it World Class, and if I keep it World Class, it's going to be a dominating performance.

Q. We've seen more takedowns from you, not so many big moves this tournament. Has that been a focused effort on your wrestling or taking just what's there?

AUSTIN GOMEZ: No, man, I'm just taking what's there. These dudes think I'm an upper body wrestler and that's just not what it is. My mantra is scared money don't make money and I'm going to live and die by the sword. That's what it is. I might force it sometimes and I might not get it and I do get it sometimes and it's freaking awesome. My leg attacks are some of the best in the world. And my reattacks are some of the best in the world. So I don't need to go upper body unless I have to. Beginning of the second period I was trying to force it a little bit and I didn't need to. Then I got right back to my leg attacks because I knew that was going to win me the match.

Q. You've qualified for the Olympics. You've talked about the folkstyle grind. Obviously you wrestled a guy from Penn State in that first match. You had to overcome injury and everything else. Was it that folkstyle grind that allowed you to push through that injury and get the come-back and ultimately qualify for the Olympics? And how did qualifying for the Olympics that change your mindset going into this tournament?

AUSTIN GOMEZ: Yeah, you know, that match with Nick Lee was a tough freaking match, got hurt, and you know, I was down on the ground and, you know, I was like, oh,

shoot, Sean is going to be pretty mad at me if I get -- if I'm hurt and I lose this match.

So I just had to dig deep. You know, to me it was you got three minutes left to go accomplish your dreams, it doesn't matter how you feel, you know? And I'm -- Derrick Saint John used to say that to me when I was at Iowa State. And I was playing that in my head. And I was like, you got two-and-a-half minutes to be one step closer to qualifying for the Olympics. And I just had to dig deep. Qualifying for the Olympics, huge weight off my shoulders. I do not have to go to Istanbul, Turkey in May or whatever it is. That allowed me -- getting the job done in Mexico and coming to the NCAAs, I was like, oh, we're going to have some fun now. Because I'm not worrying about -- because my main goal was to wrestle freestyle. I didn't want to wrestle folkstyle. That didn't come until later and that was my main concern was freestyle and that's what I wanted to do and I accomplished that goal and now it's time to accomplish one more tomorrow night.

Q. I'm not trying to bring up something bad, but why did you try to wrestle for Mexico and not qualify for the United States?

AUSTIN GOMEZ: It's something my grandparents wanted me to do. My grandmother and my Grandpa approached me and my dad and said how cool would it be for Austin to represent where his family comes from, where we come from? My grandma used to tell me all the time, don't be ashamed to be Mexican, you know? Carry that flag around with you with pride, be proud to be Mexican. So that's something that we've always dreamed of and, you know, we're getting a lot of crap for it, but we're only getting crap for it because we're beating the U.S. guys now, that's why they're getting mad at us, right?

It's okay -- not to bring up Myles Amine or anything, I love that guy, but Myles Amine doesn't get dragged under the bus because you have Dave Taylor at that weight. So why are we getting dragged under the bus? Because we're in the Pan-Ams and beating you guys? That's not our problem. That's your problem. You gotta wrestle whoever is in front of you and that's what I'm doing.

Q. A lot of critics and keyboard warriors out there, as far as you competing for Mexico, and transferring schools, what do you have to say to all the critics out there?

AUSTIN GOMEZ: I don't know, just silent, just noise that I block out. I'm going to the Olympic Games and I'm in the National Finals, so everyone can shut the hell up.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

