

2023 NCAA Wrestling Championship

Saturday, March 23, 2024

Kansas City, Missouri, USA

T-Mobile Center

Richard Figueroa

Finals Media Conference



RICHARD FIGUEROA: It was a tough one. We wrestled against each other at least two times. It's a battle. I know it's always going to be a battle with him. It's just whoever comes prepared, and today I was prepared.

Q. You used his pressure against him a lot in that match. Was that the game plan going in, knowing that he was going to look to hand fight hard and take a lot of the mat space up?

RICHARD FIGUEROA: I wrestled him a lot. I just know he wants to wear you down. But I'm too slick. I can score in all positions. And I believe in my coaches and my training what we prepared for. Just got the job done.

Q. How much did it take, what did it take to get to this point?

RICHARD FIGUEROA: A lot of sacrifice. I would say -- I hate saying it, but I was going to quit, you know, just, like, losing wasn't for me. And just going through that just made me, like, damn, is this even -- should I keep on going? Am I worn out?

But I looked up to God, said prayers, slept, said prayers, got some help. And if I was to quit what would I tell my kids later on -- how did your wrestling career go? Oh, I quit? What, you're a quitter? I just didn't want to go out like that. I wanted to be able to tell my story. And I'm glad I'm able to tell a story now.

Q. I've been asking your teammates all week long what it means to have some of the guys in your corner you've had in your corner all weekend long. After winning the national championship, what does that mean to have guys like Zeke and Frank and Eric Thompson and Lee Pritts behind you?

RICHARD FIGUEROA: It's a blessing. They recruited me, junior year, sophomore year. Just family. The way they approached me to come to their school was very different how other schools. They didn't care about what I did in the

past and stuff, but just knowing that if I'm able to become a better man as I grew up, which I have proven I have been.

And just having that support system as, like, my teammates, my strength coaches, my personal strength coach, Mike van Arsdale, my assistant, another would be Mark Perry -- just having those guys around -- Pritts and all of them, Zeke -- it's just a blessing. They're like family to me. And I thank God I made them proud today.

Q. You had a 0-0 match, tight match second period. Talk about that takedown. Was there any doubt in your mind you got that takedown? And what if they would have overturned it?

RICHARD FIGUEROA: I 100 percent had that takedown. I felt it. Freestyle plays a lot in it. I watch a lot of Russians, European wrestling. Just being able to use that into my matches in folkstyle helps a lot because these guys don't know what to do when I do these moves. That was a big part of it.

Q. Just wondering, Richie, did your Junior World experience, being three-time World Team member and a silver medalist, help you out and remain calm because you were in these big situations?

RICHARD FIGUEROA: Just the atmosphere, I mean, it's not as big as the fans, but those fans over there, they're bringing horns, they're bringing, like, drums. Iran has their chant. So it gets as loud as over here.

Just having that capability and performing out here just makes it easy. I love the big crowds. It's like Gladiator -- like, are you not entertaining?

Q. You were able to exploit a lot of things against him in the match. What was the game plan going in? You said you knew he had a lot of pressure he was going to try to put on you. Did you see something once you got in the match that really helped out? And what was the difference for you going second instead of first at 125?

RICHARD FIGUEROA: Just that pressure. Coach Zeke, he's the best in the world technician. So just having that in



your corner and doing drills in the practice room, people are pressuring you. He's like, oh, the Big Ten, we like to grab, we like to pull, and we got something for them every time we do that. So just having that in our corner, in my corner, is just a blessing.

And going up second, it's all right. I don't really care. My job is to get it done and win. That's it.

Q. It was your first time in the tournament and you won it all. What does that mean to you and the ASU wrestling program as a whole?

RICHARD FIGUEROA: It doesn't stop. One title doesn't mean this is the end. Gotta go for more than just one, two, three, as many times as I can. I'm going to keep going, go where my heart is, and being able to rep Arizona State University is a blessing.

They provide me with a lot of things, the athletics, the academics, just having that as my support system, it's a blessing. And I wouldn't trade no other.

Q. I think you're the lowest seed to ever win a national title at this weight. What's that mean for you, for the doubters wrong, and just do what you did this past weekend?

RICHARD FIGUEROA: My dad would always say -- because I would go to Tulsa, just big tournaments at a young age and competing for like Trinity, like I said, Tulsa, Oklahoma, all those big things. Seeding is just a number. No matter who they are, seeding is just a number. That's how I approach it. Seeding is just a number. I'll take these guys out one by one, which I did. I said it. I posted it. And just believe in yourself. Don't give up on yourself, too.

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