

2023 NCAA Wrestling Championship

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Kansas City, Missouri, USA

T-Mobile Center

Vito Arujau

Finals Media Conference



VITO ARUJAU: That was a doozy, partially because I'm still a little dizzy from that. I think I was really sluggish off the start, a little lackadaisical. And I think that maybe partially led to the early injury that I got. We both just bumped heads.

I went through quite some time there trying to close the gash on top of my head, which kind of threw away the first period's momentum for me.

I didn't jump out to the 1-2 takedown lead after the first that I really hoped to. But I stayed resilient, and through call and call and lost takedown, lost takedown, I just kept my foot on the gas and said, no, I'm not going to let this slip away from me.

So I slammed my foot down even further on the gas and continued to push until I finally found a takedown that the refs were comfortable with.

Q. Last year you beat (indiscernible), who they couldn't score on, you found a way to do it, just like tonight. When the second takedown was not allowed, what did you say to the official?

VITO ARUJAU: When I was yelling at him? Oh, because I had the foot in bounds, I looked at him and he started counting as if he had awarded me the takedown. So he started counting. I'm not going to give up a caution. So I exited the mat.

But if I didn't get the takedown he wouldn't have been allowed to start counting and give me an opportunity to pull him back in to finish the shot. I may have lost my temper. I said, you can't do that. But he can.

So I apologize to that referee for speaking out of terms. It's a very emotional roller coaster, but that was the debacle we had.

Q. [Inaudible]?

VITO ARUJAU: No, he's very good.

Q. [Inaudible]?

VITO ARUJAU: Just as Daton, one of his best abilities is defense and denying people those scoring opportunities, I would say my thing is getting to those offenses.

I find holes, I create motion, action, and I win those positions. And that's something that I think I do a very, very good job of. I think it's led me to the success I've had in every aspect of this sport.

Q. Obviously a very different match, very different year for you as a whole.

VITO ARUJAU: Yeah.

Q. Not what you expected in the Finals. A lot of roller coaster, up and down. You said it was an emotional match. You even lost your composure, which we don't see most of the time when you're out on the mat. What did Coach Grey say to you? I saw him grab your face and recenter you during one of the 10 stoppages. What did he say to you? And how did you recenter and get your offense moving again after the stoppage?

VITO ARUJAU: He said down and away. I said okay. And then I was still mad but I understood, down and away. Me and Mike have a really good connection. I trust him wholeheartedly.

If he tells me to go down and away, I go down and away. When he tells me to shoot, I shoot. I like it when he tells me to shoot more because I didn't know what the score was. I did get hit in the head a couple times. I wasn't thinking super straight.

But he said down and away, and I said okay. I think it was 15 seconds left. I think that was during the debacle if it was 8-2 or -- I don't know what the score was. I hope that answered the question.

Q. I have to know what your plans are for the Olympic Trials.

VITO ARUJAU: Two weeks ago I didn't know if I was going to wrestle here. So I'm currently taking it day by day and wondering what I can do, what I'm capable of. This tournament helped show me what I was capable of. And now it's just whether or not what's in my best interests.

I still very much with all my heart would love to represent this country, the United States, in the 2024 Olympics. I'm still sitting in the semifinals. We'll see how this clears up, and if everything's good to go, I will be at the trials.

Q. [Inaudible]?

VITO ARUJAU: 133 pounds?

Q. [Inaudible]?

VITO ARUJAU: To 125 pounds, 57 kilograms. Yes. I don't see why I can't. I can do anything, apparently.

Q. ESPN clocked that match at 21 minutes. I'm curious where that ranked in the longest bouts of your career? And was the length, the stoppages, the chaos of it all, did it affect you?

VITO ARUJAU: 21?

Q. That's according to the broadcast. Did it affect your wrestling?

VITO ARUJAU: In the Finals? Ever? Got their money's worth.

No, I mean, like, yeah, I thought I had a really long match at the AWAs -- a 12-minute match, wow, that's long. But that is everything that I am bad at -- stops and motion, no momentum, able to be pulled, multiple stoppages for blood, just smack my head. Just terrible.

I don't know if a single call went my way. But just persevering, staying in there, get your head down into the fight and just let it rip, and I think that's what I did.

Q. Were you frustrated with the officiating?

VITO ARUJAU: I don't know a sane person would be in my situation. At the same time, the reaction time, I'm not mad at the refs, whether or not, whatever. I was just frustrated in what was happening and the fact that yeah, I may be a little dazed and I was losing a little more blood than I would have liked to. But ultimately adversity, and we challenged that.

Q. If you said you were not maybe ready after you had

AWAs, what did you do between then and now to get ready?

VITO ARUJAU: At AWAs I was still very much concerned with my injuries. I was very much trying to limit contact with my head and my neck and my everything. I was trying to kind of wrestle but not really hurt myself, which it just doesn't work. It doesn't work in the level that I wrestle at.

I need to be able to put my body on the line. I have to ante up a certain amount, and that is everything. I have to put everything on the line in order to go out there and wrestle the way that I want to.

We noticed after AWAs, I tried to be really careful and I didn't hurt myself at all. We got back and we said let's just see where we're at. So I had a really, really just grinder of a day. I wrestled with Yanni live at practice. I took a couple hits to the head. To my surprise it wasn't as bad as I thought it was. That gave me the confidence to return to things I was good at -- a lot of head motion, a lot of just getting in there and fighting.

If I had watched this match just now two weeks ago, I'd be like, there's no way I could do that. But I've gone and said this before, through Cornell wrestling, the support staff we have there and our alumni base and everyone helping out, I really have them to thank for allowing me to come out here and wrestle today because the way it was going I wasn't sure, but they had faith in me when I did not.

Q. Just want to know how cool it is that not just you but Jacori Teemer is also going to be in the finals and you trained in the same room since you were little?

VITO ARUJAU: I'm super excited for Jacori as well. Super cool to see VHW, that's the club that my dad runs. It's where I learned how to wrestle. It's where Jacori learned how to wrestle. It's cool to see we've continued to hone our crafts even after moving away to college and taking on a new family of sorts.

Just to know we both have similar roots and similar starts, to see that we've both come a long ways is really heartwarming for me.

Q. You talked about a lot of the stoppages and how you didn't have confidence to really stick your head in there when we talked yesterday. You bashed your head into him a ton of times. Like you blew straight through his face. He was bleeding, head wrap, everything else. Talk about the confidence you have in yourself going into a match like that and how it really grew as the time went on.

VITO ARUJAU: I was really nervous before that match. I know everyone was making jokes or whatever, Fix is going to lose because he has to. No, he doesn't have to. He's a really, really good opponent.

If I didn't wrestle this week last, he would be the national champ, no doubt in my mind, he's that good. World medalist. He's been on the stage relevant for how many years now, right? So I was very nervous. Then the whistle blew and I started wrestling and I forgot everything.

And then I ran up on him with my little crawl and bashed heads, oh, I'm bleeding now. So confidence, there was no confidence, there was no thinking, it was just wrestling. And I'm sure he knows that as well. I have nothing but admiration for Daton and respect. I bet he understands as well that it was a dogfight because we both wanted to win.

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