

How they fit: Broncos' Day 3 picks

By STAFF

DenverBroncos.com

April 28, 2018

Pick No. 217 (sixth round): Washington ILB Keishawn Bierria

As the second linebacker to be picked by the Broncos on the third day of the draft, Bierria will be expected to compete in a deep room led by veterans Brandon Marshall and Todd Davis.

But whereas fourth-round pick Josey Jewell's top attribute is being a tackling machine, Bierria's is having a nose for recovering or forcing turnovers. Bierria secured six interceptions, seven fumbles and four forced fumbles in his career. He also recorded 240 career total tackles and 7.5 sacks.

The Broncos struggled to come up with turnovers in 2017, snagging just 10 interceptions and recovered seven of eight fumbles they forced. Those combined 17 takeaways ranked 26th in the NFL.

If Bierria's turnover touch continues at the next level, he could be a very valuable contributor for the Broncos.

Keishawn Bierria selected by Denver Broncos in sixth round of NFL draft

By Gina Mizell
The Denver Post
April 28, 2018

The Denver Broncos took Washington linebacker Keishawn Bierria in the sixth round of the NFL draft, the second player at that position that Denver added on the draft's final day.

Denver took Iowa linebacker Josey Jewell in the fourth round earlier Saturday. Bierria, who went 217th overall, totaled 60 tackles (four for loss), two forced fumbles and two fumble recoveries last season.

The Broncos acquired that sixth-round pick earlier Saturday by dealing a fifth-rounder to the Los Angeles Rams.

Denver's other draft picks thus far are North Carolina State defensive end Bradley Chubb with the fifth overall pick, Courtland Sutton (40th overall) in the second round, Oregon running back Royce Freeman (71st overall) and Boston College cornerback Isaac Yiadom (99th overall) in the third round, Penn State wide receiver DaeSean Hamilton in the fourth round (113th overall), Wisconsin tight end Troy Fumagalli in the fifth round (156th overall) and Arizona State offensive lineman Sam Jones in the sixth round (183rd overall).

The Broncos' final pick in the draft is a seventh-rounder (226th overall).

About Keishawn Bierria

Size: 6-foot, 230 pounds

College: Washington

Age: 23

Three things to know

- Bierria led the Football Bowl Subdivision with five fumble recoveries in 2016 and was named second-team All-Pac-12 by league coaches.
- Bierria, a Carson, Calif., native, was a three-star rated high school prospect who chose UW over Colorado, Iowa State and others.
- Bierria has dealt with personal tragedy in his life with his father passing away from cancer and his mother winning a battle with leukemia.

Scouting report

Strengths: Has been a consistent performer in all three years as a starter. ... Plays with desired urgency and effort on every snap. ... Patient and smart. ... Spots his keys and slides into position to find ball carrier on interior runs

Weaknesses: Very average athlete with hips and feet that are a little sticky. ... Lack of top-end speed and reactive athleticism creates a much smaller margin for error. ... Will miss tackles when forced to try and make them from challenging angles.

Becoming a role model — on the field and off

By STAFF

Washington Tyee Club

2018

When Husky Football player Keishawn Bierria was just eight years old, his dad died of cancer. His mom struggled with grief and lost custody of her four kids to Keishawn's grandparents. Planning for a college education wasn't high on the list of family concerns.

"All we wanted to do was play sports," the linebacker says. "Then, when Division I colleges started talking to my older brother and other high school athletes, they couldn't accept offers because their grades didn't qualify."

Keishawn took notice and earned straight-As his senior year, eager to keep up his academic success when he came to Washington. He entered the accelerated LEAP program the summer before his freshman year — "the hardest course I ever took in college".

Diagnosed with a learning disability at the UW, Keishawn worked with a specialist throughout his four years. Tutors helped him with tough courses like statistics, and he also took advantage of the UW writing center for help with papers. A study-abroad trip to Hawaii to study indigenous populations enriched his education.

"It was hard to fail with so much support," he says.

Keishawn did more than simply not fail. He earned the team's Academic Achievement Award, along with receiving the Guy Flaherty Most Inspirational Award — twice. And he graduated early with not one degree but two, in Sociology and in American Ethnic Studies with an anthropology minor.

"Every year, I took full credits. For the last football season, I was fully enrolled like I was a freshman," states Keishawn, who hopes to play in the NFL or to become a coach. "It was important to me because I had the support to do it. I had a lot of younger teammates who looked up to me. I could set an example not just on the field but in the classroom. It was the right thing to do."

Keishawn Bierria, LB, Washington

By STAFF

CBS Sports

April 9, 2018

Draft Prospect Outlook:

Off-ball linebacker who digressed during his collegiate career and played much slower in 2017 than he did in 2016. Not a consistent block-shedder, lacks athleticism and doesn't make plays in coverage.

College Recap:

A 247Sports Composite three-star recruit out of Harbor City, California, Bierria started four games and played in 10 others as a redshirt freshman, finishing the year with 35 tackles (three for loss) and one sack. He had what would be a career-best 77 tackles (7.5 for loss) with 3.5 sacks and a forced fumble as a sophomore, posting a 12-tackle performance against Cal and notching a pair of sacks against Arizona State. Bierria earned second-team All-Pac-12 honors in 2016 after putting up 68 tackles (five for loss) with two sacks, two passes defensed, two forced fumbles and an FBS-best five fumble recoveries.

Bierria was again named second-team All-Pac-12 as a senior, recording 60 tackles (four for loss) with one sack, two passes defensed, one forced fumble and one fumble recovery. He saved his best game for last, notching a season-best 11 tackles (including seven solo stops) against Penn State in the Fiesta Bowl. -- R.J. White

Washington Football LB Keishawn Bierria client of Best Agency

By Bret Stuter

Fansided

February 21, 2018

Washington Football team linebacker Keishawn Bierria joins teammate Azeem Victor as he takes his first step towards an NFL career by signing his agent

The Washington Football team will need to fill another set of big shoes this off-season. Following linebacker Azeem Victor, standout Keishawn Bierria now joins his teammate in aiming at an NFL career. And similar to Victor, Bierria has taken his first step towards an NFL career by signing up with Best Football Agency.

After all, it's not surprising that an NFL hopeful and talented linebacker should commit to an agent as he prepares for the NFL Combine and 2018 NFL Draft. In fact, the outcome of these two events dictate a great deal about a football player's future. As such, it's wise for any athlete heading to events of this magnitude to seek a guide. In the end, the sports agents have been there, done that, before.

2018 NFL Combine

On March 1, 2018, Keishawn Bierria will join seven hopeful Washington Football players invited to the 2017 NFL Combine. And from our perspective, it's hard to truly describe the intense pressure placed on each young man at the combine. This is a make-or-break moment for each athlete. And so, no true opportunities for a do-over.

From the moment each player arrives, they are subject to scoring of potential fit with each NFL football team. Height, weight, confidence, subject matter knowledge, perspective, and physical strength, speed, agility, endurance, and accuracy will all be graded. But most of all, it is validating the play on the field. In the end, the decisions happen in the video room. Then the combine confirms the decision.

So what do you see?

So what do you see when you watch videos of Keishawn Bierria? Most see a true NFL competitor, a young man who never quit on his defensive assignment. At 6-foot-2 and 223 pounds, he is the right size and weight to get to the ball-carrier quickly, and stop him in his tracks when he arrives.

He can deliver on special teams, as well as run an outstanding defense. The fact is that he paired up with a good teammate in Azeem Victor, and the pair compliments each other well, aids both in their quest for NFL attention. Here is a young man who plays the role of linebacker well. He knows his assignments, executes the play, and is aware of the football activity around him.

While most project Bierria as a 2018 NFL Draft day three prospect, do not rule out a couple teams falling in love with the blue-collar, high work ethic caliber player. The NFL has seen what comes out of Washington recently. That is a huge plus in the very competitive NFL.

Saturday will be the final stand for UW alpha dog Keishawn Bierria

By Ryan Clark
The News Tribune
October 29, 2017

You're never going to see Keishawn Bierria play for Washington again after Saturday but the legacy he's built should be felt for seasons to come.

Bierria is a touchstone. He is the gateway between an era of unfulfilled promise under Steve Sarkisian and a potential golden era with Chris Petersen. Every bit of information he's learned over five years has been passed down to the team's younger players like sophomore safety Taylor Rapp and junior linebackers Ben Burr-Kirven and Tevis Bartlett.

UW's young players are learning a lesson from Bierria this week leading up the Saturday showdown with No. 9 Penn State (10-2) in the Fiesta Bowl. Instead of making the final game of his college career about him, Bierria would rather make it about those who will carry on after he's graduated.

"It's kind of hit me but at the end of the day, I'm always going to be here for my brothers," Bierria said. "I'm just trying to be there for them. These last few weeks, these last few days, I've been trying to slow myself down and understand where I'm at right now and make the best of the moment."

So much has changed from when Bierria arrived in 2013 through now.

The Huskies were breaking into the conversation of being a Top 25 team when Sarkisian left for USC. In came Petersen, his staff and a new way of doing things.

He was a composite three-star prospect who took a redshirt during the 2013 campaign, his first season at UW.

Bierria became something of a blueprint for UW's new regime when it came to developing players. He was trusted in his first full season to play all 14 games. Bierria earned four starts and was named a captain against rival Oregon.

From there, he'd become a three-year starter who has become a building block for one of the best defenses in college football.

"He's a unique guy that he's such a good player and he's always working to get better himself," Petersen said. "It's nice to watch his game continue to grow and become a real detailed player."

"The best thing that he does is his presence on the field and in the locker room with the guys."

Burr-Kirven said Bierria's ability to lead is why he's a two-time winner of the Guy Flaherty Most Inspirational Award.

Bierria is only the fifth player in program history to win the award twice.

"I think ever since I got here, he's always been a leader," Burr-Kirven said. "You hear his voice no matter if its winter workouts or during the game. He's always barking and telling guys we have to keep going, we have to keep pushing.

"It's a testament to the fact that he's a great player on the field but he's been such a mentor to so many guys on this team."

Go through every possible achievement and Bierria's done it.

The last two seasons have seen him be named to the second-team All-Pac 12 team and he also won a team academic achievement award this year.

He's won a Pac-12 championship and even reached the College Football Playoff final.

Attaining those sort of credentials is another reason why Bierria is so respected by his teammates. Rapp said he learned a lot but the biggest lesson he took from Bierria was how to be a leader.

"I had to emerge as a leader and step up as a leader. Kevin (King), Sidney (Jones) and Budda (Baker) were all leaders in the secondary" said Rapp, of the three defensive backs who all became second-round NFL Draft picks. "I had to come up and step up as a leader. He taught me by example how to come a leader."

Perhaps one of the less highlighted areas of Bierria's leadership is how he deals with the media.

After UW's 30-22 loss at Stanford, he stuck around for nearly 10 minutes. He granted a reporter a one-on-one and then took the same questions from the entire group without hesitation.

On Wednesday, he was one of five defensive players who spoke with the media. A Phoenix-based reporter opened their question to Bierria about UW's loss to Arizona State only to ask his thoughts on how new coach Herm Edwards would fare with the Sun Devils.

Bierria didn't skip a beat and answered the question in a respectful manner.

"I've just grown more. Mentally, physically and I kind of understand more complex situations and critical thinking," he said. "As far as that, I've just tried to build stronger relationships with my teammates and the people around me."

Petersen said Bierria possesses the "it factor" that allows him to be a leader who, at the same time, can be selfless for the benefit of others.

UW returns several defensive starters for next season including Bartlett and Burr-Kirven at linebacker. Getting another linebacker to fill Bierria's spot on the field shouldn't be difficult.

The real challenge will be seeing how takes over Bierria's role as the team's emotional leader.

“He’s been here a long time and he’s one of those guys where its like, ‘Wow. Where did this go? Keishawn’s actually going to be done,’” Petersen said. “You’re here for a long time and it just goes so fast. I’m excited for him to play this game.”

Student Athlete of the Week: Keishawn Bierria

By Amanda Scurlock
Los Angeles Sentinel
August 24, 2017

Only the biggest stages can handle him and he is no stranger to postseason matchups. He is a member of the reigning Pac-12 champions: the Washington Huskies.

“Everybody wants to beat us because we won the Pac-12 [championship] last year,” linebacker Keishawn Bierria said. “But my goal is to go out there and win it again. You’re not hunting me, I’m hunting you.”

The linebacker enters his senior year off a promising 2016 campaign, starting all 14 games resulting in five fumble recoveries, more than any player in the NCAA FBS that season.

He made two sacks for 17 yards and a kick return for 45 yards. Off that kick return, Bierria made his first touchdown for the Huskies during their 44-18 rout against the Arizona State Sun Devils. He registered 5.0 tackles for loss for 25 yards.

With help from Bierria, Washington was ranked fourth in the AP rankings, only suffering two losses. The Huskies decimated the Colorado Buffs 41-10 in the Pac-12 Championship match, the Washington defense holding the Buffs to 163 total yards.

Despite losing the national semifinal 24-7 against the top ranked Alabama, Bierria made seven tackles. Building the program into the national power that it is today took some trial and error, according to Bierria.

“We really had to just figure out what’s the best thing for this team and the first thing was building unity,” he said. “So now, we got guys who [are] barbequing every weekend, everybody just hanging out with each other.”

In the offseason, Bierria went on a study abroad trip to Hawaii to finish his minor in anthropology.

“It was a great trip, we did some farming,” he said in an interview with the Pac-12 Network. “We farmed Taro plant which is like the indigenous plant of Hawaii.”

As a junior, Bierria made 70 tackles, 42 of them being unassisted. The team elected Bierria to be the recipient of the 109th annual Guy Flaherty Most Inspirational Award.

Bierria, a Carson native, attended Narbonne High school after transferring from Carson; he played for both football teams. Playing for the Gauchos was helpful for Bierria and his talent helped give the football program a dominant reputation.

“We definitely had a really good team chemistry, they definitely focused on us off the field more than on the field as far as academics, making sure we were college ready,” he said. “We just had to strive for what we knew we can succeed for and we actually did it.”

The Gauchos only endured four losses over the span of Bierria's junior and senior seasons. Bierria helped Narbonne to the team's back-to-back City Section Championships in 2011 and 2012. His talent pegged him on the All-CIF City Section first team and earned him playing time in the Semper Fidelis All-American Bowl as a senior.

"When I first went to Narbonne, people didn't really think we [could] be in a playoff game," Bierria said. "I looked at the athletes on the team, I was like, 'we're pretty good, I think we might end up playing Mater Dei or beating someone like Corona Centennial,' and sure enough, we end up winning two back-to-back championships."

Why July 26 is more than just a birthday for the Huskies'

Keishawn Bierria

By Christian Caple
The News Tribune
July 26, 2017

Wednesday was special for Keishawn Bierria. July 26 always is.

The Washington Huskies' senior linebacker spent his day answering questions and posing for pictures at Loews Hollywood Hotel, representing his team at this year's Pac-12 media days. It's a particularly fun trip for Bierria, because he grew up in nearby Carson, California, and starred at Narbonne High School. He'll get to visit his mother and family before he returns to Seattle, where the Huskies begin fall camp on Monday.

But this day was significant for another reason: it was Bierria's birthday, and he shares his birthday with his late father, Lowell, who died of cancer when Bierria was 8 years old, on Christmas Day in 2003.

"It's been weighing on me a lot throughout my life, just being able to share that day with him," Bierria said. "Growing up, I used to always look forward to this day, because we used to have like a dual party. But it's just kind of one of those things I got used to living with.

"It's a blessing to me."

His most cherished memories are of late-night bike rides at the beach with his father and three brothers – now ages 25, 23 and 19.

"Five or 6 years old, that's pretty fun," Bierria said. "Everything I did with my father was fun."

The day capped an eventful summer for UW's top returning tackler. He graduated in June with a degree in Sociology and American Ethnic Studies, then participated in a month-long, study-abroad program in Hawaii, on the island of Oahu, through the school's Anthropology department.

There, Bierria learned about taro farming on the Ka'ala Farm, helped restore a "600-year-old pond that was used for natural irrigation for fish," and worked with a group that helped teach water safety.

"When you say you studied abroad in Hawaii," Bierria said, "people are going to be like, 'oh, Hawaii.' But we really learned a lot out there. It was a great trip."

For now, he will relish this current trip home, a final respite before the grind of the college football season.

And he will do so as a 22-year-old, honoring his father's 52nd year all the while.

"I always get to share this day with my father, even though he's not been here," Bierria said. "But he's always here. Even if we didn't share the same birthday, all my brothers feel like we've got the same type of relationship with him. I still remember his face. Still remember his voice. It was very powerful."

SHORTER HALFTIMES

Pac-12 commissioner Larry Scott said the league will shorten halftime from 20 minutes to 15, and eliminate some commercial breaks, for nonconference games televised by the Pac-12 Networks this season.

The changes are being made in an effort to address complaints about the length of college football games.

“We've worked with our universities on these proposed modifications, and over the next few weeks we'll be finalizing exactly which games during the non-conference season will be piloted.”

The Huskies play two nonconference games televised by the Pac-12 Networks: Sept. 9 vs. Montana, and Sept. 16 vs. Fresno State.

Scott also said the conference will expand its central replay officiating command center to assist all 12 teams with the in-game replay review process. Oregon and California experimented with the technology last season.

“Our team in the command center will work in concert with our in-stadium replay officials to manage the replay process for all Pac-12 home-hosted games,” Scott said. “We expect this is going to lead to even more consistency in replay reviews.”

The Details: Bierria Raised In A Family Of Fighters

By Mason Kelly
GoHuskies.com
October 21, 2016

Simonne Bierria started to laugh. She was talking about her son, Washington standout Keishawn Bierria. She was looking back on the beginning, the very beginning – the moment the linebacker was born.

The third of Simonne's four boys, Bierria's birth was the shortest, but it was also the "worst labor I ever had," she said.

Thinking about that moment and looking at the person and player her son has become, that sparked the laughter.

"He came out built," she said. "He came out with that six pack."

He was a fighter from Day 1. He had to be. To get to this point, he had to take more punches than most.

As a child, his father, Lowell, beat cancer once, a fight he couldn't win the second time. And now, during his career at Washington, he has been forced to watch as Simonne spent years battling and then beating leukemia.

It wasn't easy. But Lowell was a fighter. Simonne is a fighter. Bierria only knows one way to live his life.

"Today's never promised," he said. "Tomorrow isn't promised. Experiencing adversity in my life has shown me that what I'm going through right now could be a lot worse and it's definitely going to get better than what it is right now."

Six games into his junior season, Bierria is second on the team in tackles. He leads the nation in fumble recoveries. He is a leader, a three-star recruit coming out of Narbonne High School in Harbor City, Calif., who has become a vital contributor for the fifth-ranked Huskies. He is here because, through all of the hard times, he kept pushing forward.

"No matter what you do, don't give up," Simonne said, talking about the mindset she helped instill in her children. "You do it the best you can do it, to the best of your ability. That's all you can do. Then you let God take you the rest of the way."

Bierria is here, because he refuses to stop fighting for his future.

"You've got to fight," Washington coach Chris Petersen said. "You've got to keep doing what you can do. You've got to battle. That's what Keishawn does. That's what he's done."

"He's one of those unique special guys who can stay strong and focused. It's a story we can all learn from."

As far as Simonne is concerned, Bierria has been this way since the day he was born. That brutal birth, the day the fighter was born, well, it was July 26, 1995 – his father's birthday.

And, now that her son is a man, Simonne sees her husband in Bierria. In fact, she sees Lowell in each of her four children.

"My husband is not gone, because I see him in all four of those boys," she said.

When the boys – Marques, Dominique, Keishawn and Trevon – were younger, participating in sports was often "everything we did as a family," Simonne said.

They traveled the West Coast with basketball and baseball teams. Life was good. Lowell would make the journey to Alaska to work on fishing boats and Simonne had a beauty and barbershop.

Her youngest children – Trevon is now a safety at San Jose State – played on the same basketball team as their cousin, Junior. And, when the three boys were on the court together, it was like they were their own team within a team. They drew the ire of some of the other parents who had children in the program.

Lowell asked the boys to include the other players on the team.

"You guys need to pass the ball to the other kids," he said.

Bierria looked at his father and said, "They don't want to win, dad." It was another early glimpse of the fighter he is today.

But, for all those moments that still make Simonne smile, there were just as many tough times. Lowell developed an abscess in his mouth. It was diagnosed as osteosarcoma, a type of bone cancer. He went through chemotherapy. He beat it back.

"He was good," Simonne said. The cancer went into remission for five years.

As Lowell fought the cancer, the family worked through a series of financial hardships. Simonne had to go to court to fight a fallout with her business partner – "I won," she said – the family had to move and the kids were pulled from private school.

But, "we just stayed prayed up," Simonne said.

Once the cancer went into remission, Lowell started working in construction.

"Back to work," he told his wife at the time.

Things got better. Simonne started working at a college. They bought a new house. They kids were back in private school and, "life was pretty sweet," Simonne said.

The family seemed to be back on track when Lowell's cancer returned. This time it was in his spine. At one point he spent three months in the ICU. He had three major surgeries in a week and, eventually, he was paralyzed.

"It just ate him up," Simonne said.

He died in 2003. It was Christmas day. Simonne brought her husband home a few days earlier to spend time with his children. People close to the family made the holiday a memorable one. There were gifts stacked up all over the living room.

"The kids had an awesome Christmas," she said.

It was a time for Lowell to say goodbye to his family. They spent the day together. He died that evening.

"My husband took his last breath at 6:43 p.m.," Simonne said.

Lowell spent the final hours of his life watching his children play in the backyard. Then it started to drizzle. Trevon, Bierria's youngest brother, ran inside. He grabbed his father.

"Daddy, I love you," he said.

A few minutes later, Lowell was gone. Bierria was 8.

"It didn't seem real at first," he said. "I didn't understand what that really meant. I cried a little bit and then asked if I could go outside and play."

It wasn't until weeks later that reality set in. That realization hit the family hard.

"The day she lost her husband, my father, she thought she would never find anyone else, nobody else would hold her down like he did, because he was her rock," Bierria said.

As the months passed, Simonne couldn't fight off the depression.

"It just really hit me he wasn't coming back," she said.

A religious woman, Lowell's death shook the foundation of her devotion.

"I couldn't see it," she said. "I was mad at him (God) for taking my husband, taking my kids' father, taking a good man, a provider."

Simonne didn't know how to communicate the grief to her children. Before Lowell's death, when she would drive her children to school, they would recite the Lord's Prayer together. The kids knew when to begin – "Our father, who art in Heaven" – so they would say the last line as they pulled up to school.

But, in the years that followed, "my mom wasn't really able to be there mentally and physically."

As Simonne processed her grief, family and friends helped keep Bierria and his brothers pointed toward a positive future. They moved in with their grandparents, James and Michelle Whitmore.

Marques and Dominique set an example for Bierria and Trevon.

"My older brothers took care of me," Bierria said. "I took care of my younger brother. That explains our relationship now. We're really close. We'd do anything for each other."

Family friends filled any gaps, like Bierria's godmother, Mattie Jones-Gill.

"That woman stuck with my kids from beginning to end," Simonne said. "There's nothing she wouldn't do for him."

There was a time a family friend brought the boys home. When Simonne opened the door, the woman was crying.

Their children were on their way to McDonald's when they passed a flower store. There were people out front with a sign asking for money to help pay for their father's funeral.

Simonne's boys asked to stop and give the people money.

"I have never met kids as gracious as yours, who are willing to help anybody," the woman said.

When Bierria was younger his mother always said, "Be a blessing to somebody." The linebacker and his brothers listened.

"It's a beautiful thing when you know that, through the hard times, they're still smiling," Simonne said.

While Simonne worked to get her life back on track, her boys did what they could to help.

"We tried to just be there for her, just be an inspiration to her," Bierria said.

Over the years there were tough times, what Simonne described as "trials and tribulations." There were AA meetings and NA meetings as she worked to find her faith.

"It hasn't been a glory ride for me," she said.

But, through it all, regardless of what she's dealt with, Bierria and his brothers always had what they needed.

"It was really a community effort," he said. "She made sure we had everything we needed, but mentally she wasn't there. She made sure we were never hurting for anything, but she really couldn't be there for us, because she was going through it."

Over time, things started to get back on track. Bierria earned a scholarship to Washington. Simonne had regained her faith.

Then before Bierria moved to Seattle, Simonne was diagnosed with leukemia. She waited to tell her younger sons. She didn't want them to worry.

"I was sneaking behind their backs to get chemo, because I didn't want them to think, 'Oh, my God, if I leave, something is going to happen to my mom,'" she said. "I waited until they got good and settled."

Bierria still remembers the day he learned the news. It was a shock, another obstacle to hurdle.

"She's a warrior," Bierria said. "She's been fighting it the whole time. She really doesn't want to leave us, so she's done everything she can."

In the hospital, after receiving her diagnoses, Simonne was at peace.

"It is what it is," she said to herself. "I'm good."

In that moment, she had a conversation with a higher power. She began to make sense of her journey.

"When I look back at my life, Lord, when I didn't think You cared, I understand that these journeys we have in life, these episodes we go through make us the person we are today and that is all because of You," she said. "There's no way I could have done it without You."

Simonne went through two-week cycles of chemotherapy and then had two weeks to rest. She needed a bone marrow transplant, but couldn't find a match.

"Last year, I opted for a trial with the umbilical cord from a newborn baby," she said.

And today, well, "I'm leukemia free." There have been a few setbacks along the way, and a trip to the hospital where she was on life support for three days.

But, after "fighting for her life," Simonne is now able to watch her sons play football. Her first chance to watch Bierria play for the Huskies was during last season's win at USC, just a few days after being released from the hospital following the transplant.

"She's a trooper," Bierria said.

She's a fighter, just like Lowell, just like her children. Their journey hasn't been easy, but they're still smiling.

"Nobody wants to go through any adversity, certainly not that type," Petersen said. "For a guy to be resilient, optimistic and positive, to not let something like that derail him from doing really good things in his life, it's so cool, so inspiring."

"It doesn't matter who you are, those things are life changing. It's hard on anyone. He's just always been so strong in those aspects."

After all of the struggles, things are back on track for Bierria's family. The linebacker is having a strong season for one of the nation's top teams, his mother is healthy and his brothers are doing well.

There is success after the struggle.

"I'm very proud of them," Simonne said, talking about her children. "When I see them smile, when I see them doing certain stuff, I'm very thankful. It's an awesome feeling."

She is proud of them. They are proud of her. She provides inspiration for Bierria. He returns the favor.

"She's everything to us," Bierria said. "She's the reason I work so hard. I try to just keep pushing, just keep focusing on moving forward and trying to get better in whatever I'm trying to do."

To get to this point, Bierria has taken more punches than most. But a fighter from Day 1, he survived. Just look at him now.