President Begaye encourages Navajo athletes at rodeo

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LAS VEGAS, N.V. — Rodeo opens the doors to education and career opportunities, President Russell Begaye told a crowd of Navajo qualifiers Friday at the 43rd annual Indian National Finals Rodeo.

For the second year in a row, the Office of the President hosted a luncheon reception for Navajo contestants and their families at the South Point Arena and Equestrian Center.

More than 75 Navajo athletes and fans took a break from rodeo events to celebrate their culture and exchange words of encouragement.

“It takes a lot of time and commitment to get to this level,” Begaye told athletes. “We’re behind you, cheering for you. You make our Nation proud.”

Athletes representing more than 50 tribal nations contended in the weeklong competition, which pitted the best native rodeo athletes in the United States and Canada against each other. Navajos dominated every event.

Of the eight winners of the average races, six were Navajo. They were crowned during a ceremony Saturday night.

The 2018 Navajo world champions are: Delvecchio Kaye, bareback; Taniah Nez, ladies breakaway; Creighton Curley, saddle bronc; Donovan Yazzie, tie-down roping; Ed Hawley and Myles John, team roping; and Latrell Long, bull riding. Nine-time qualifier Faith Holyan took the women’s all-around title.

“Hard work always pays off,” Begaye said. “Rodeo teaches you discipline. Use that discipline to get to the next level, to achieve your education goals, to keep making the Navajo Nation proud.”