

Big Brothers, Big Sisters Celebrate Special Graduation

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By Rudabeh Shahbazi



MIAMI (CBSMiami) – Graduation season is pretty much over, but for one group of high school seniors, they got to walk across the stage for a second time.

“Good evening everyone, my name is Julio Burgos and I graduated last week from Miami Central High School. Go Rockets! This fall I will be attending Syracuse University through the Posse Foundation Scholarship which is full tuition scholarship up to five years,” said Julio Burgos, 19, who took part in a special graduation celebration with nearly 300 high-school seniors from all over Miami-Dade County.

These students are not only being honored by their parents and teachers, they are celebrating with their mentors who are all part of the Big Brothers Big Sisters Organization of Miami.

On this day in Marlins Park, these excited teens stood up in their seats, held up signs that read “Thank You,” and gave their mentors a big thank you for all of their time, advice, and support.

“And I think that investment that was made in me, I feel compelled to do the same so just keep that in mind,” said Burgos.

In the stands a very proud mentor, Richard Brunet. He’s mentored Julio for the last two years by taking part in the Big Brothers, Big Sisters school-to-work program.

“Let me tell you how motivated this kid is, he dropped his wrestling team so he could dedicate more time to getting extra credits, to dedicate time to find the right school and apply for it. And go to different programs so he can get more chances to get scholarships and give back, that’s him,” said Brunet.

Brunet said they connected because of their similar backgrounds. Burgos immigrated to the United States from the Dominican Republic. Brunet immigrated to the U.S. from Brazil.

“I had some of the same hardships he had over here. Had to come here, had to work, new culture, new language, and new country, everything is new. And I had a hard time you know, like most immigrants that come here,” said Brunet.

“I moved to the U.S. when I was eight-years-old. I moved to New York City and Spanish was my only language and the kids would make fun of me in third grade. I realized that if I didn’t push forward and ignore them then I would never have learned the language and I did change myself with a lot of help from teachers and watching the news. It’s not perfect right now but I’m still trying to improve,” said Burgos.

The teen credits mentoring programs with getting him on the right path.

“I think mentoring is important because a lot of the kids they are just so accustomed to one life and that’s the inner city life or the life that they just see at school. But I think that where you are able to mentor someone you are able

to open their eyes and teach them that there is another world out there,” he said.

It was a bitter sweet ending for these “bigs” and “littles,” but they will tell you it’s all worth it.

“We should have more males involved in these programs. The next generation is here and we need to prepare them even if it’s just a little bit, you never know if you will be preparing the President of the United States,” said Brunet.

If you want to get involved, check out Big Brothers Big Sisters of Miami at bbbsmiami.org.