

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: First Round - Prairie View A&M vs Florida

Thursday, March 19, 2026

Tampa, Florida, USA

Benchmark International Arena

Florida Gators

Coach Todd Golden

Alex Condon

Rueben Chinyelu

Micah Handlogten

Thomas Haugh

Media Conference

Q. For Thomas and Alex, I think you're the only two that have played, and this is going to be your third NCAA Tournament on this roster currently. What have you guys learned along the way to the National Championship run last year?

THOMAS HAUGH: Just so special this tournament is. I think it's the greatest sporting event that there is out there. It's just super special. I think we took what we learned from that Colorado loss my first year here and just built on it. You can't take any games for granted in the tournament. Every team that's here is good. They deserve to be here. That's the main thing I learned from it.

ALEX CONDON: I think what Tommy said. You lose one game and you're out, so can't take any games for granted obviously we've doing a lot of winning, we won last year. And we can't get complacent this year. It's a different year. We've got to be hungry every game and can't take anything for granted.

Q. How have you been able to flush what happened in Nashville out and get totally refocused this week for this tournament?

MICAH HANDLOGTEN: I am think throughout practice this week, just realizing that although we were on a pretty good win streak before that, it can all turn around really quickly. It kind of brought us back down to earth. We realized if we want this, we've got to work for it harder. So



we took it on the chin and worked really hard this week.

RUEBEN CHINYELU: I would say just knowing that you cannot change what's in front of us, so just focus on being present and trying to know that you're only here once. So you just have to go there, respect the game, and just try to put yourself in a good position, which we didn't do last game. So I think we feel that and we know what we've worked on and we already know to go out there and play as a team and enjoy it.

Q. Alex and Rueben, guys, most of your teammates grew up in this country watching this event, dreaming about playing in March Madness. What about for you guys, growing up in Australia and Nigeria? Is there a comparable sporting event that you grew up wanting to some day maybe play in or maybe it was even this one from afar.

ALEX CONDON: Yeah, I think for me, AFL, I was a crazy AFL fan growing up, Australian rules football. Always wanted to play in that final game, which is equivalent to the Final Four here. Started watching basketball a little bit later, and I think started watching when UConn did their little back to back.

Yeah, as soon as I saw it and saw the environment, it's unbelievable, fans go crazy here. And definitely hungry to get back to that big stage because I've experienced it once now, so I think all of us are really keen to get back.

RUEBEN CHINYELU: For me it was kind of different because back home, my family would be on vacation, so mostly it was like football in Nigeria. So I didn't get to do that. But once I started playing basketball in Senegal, we'd stay up to watch the NCAA game, Final Four and stuff like that. Just seeing that, hoping to play there one day, and doing that, and now trying to do that again.

Q. (No microphone.)

THOMAS HAUGH: Like the first time -- just like memories of it?

MICAH HANDLOGTEN: Yeah, growing up in North Carolina, I was a huge UNC fan growing up. So we would be in middle school and high school and they would put on



the games during class if we had a study hall or something like that. And we would all be sitting there watching, going crazy during class. It's just like a dream to be able to come out here and compete on that stage that I grew up watching.

THOMAS HAUGH: Same with me. I grew up watching it as a kid. I remember the championship always being on Monday and I remember my mom letting me stay up to watch it. I remember Chris Chiozza's buzzer beater, some stuff like that.

Q. They talk about guard play being so critical in the NCAA and the backcourt has come along well this year. But this is a front court kind of built team. What do you guys think makes you guys so formidable up front?

THOMAS HAUGH: I mean, I know I'm kind of work out with the guards a little bit this year, but I think it's a credit to Coach Hartman. Since we've been here, he's just been amazing to us. He's been an amazing person off the court and amazing coach on the court. He's able to transform all four of us into the players we are today, and I think it's just a ton of credit to him.

MICAH HANDLOGTEN: I'd say that our team motto has always been the mentally and physically tougher team wins. I think everyone has to be mentally tough, but I think we take pride in the physical aspect of it. If you get hit, hit back harder, something like that. I think we kind of really embrace that role and try to implement that into our team.

RUEBEN CHINYELU: To add on to what they say, I would say just knowing that we're all loving each other and knowing we're going to go out there and play together, fight together as a team to put ourselves in a good spot. And I think that's what we did, and I think that's our superpower, just playing off each other, enjoying each other, knowing each other's strengths and weaknesses and knowing how to help each other on the court.

And I think that's a big factor to our success and everything we do. That's something that I think I look back on that I just really enjoyed, and just glad to be here among this beautiful group.

ALEX CONDON: Yeah, just the depth that we have, we have the luxury of having Micah come off the bench. We're very lucky to have a presence like that coming off the bench. If one of us get in foul trouble or anything like that, we always have a backup.

I give credit to the guards as well this year. These guards came on to a team that had a lot of the front court coming

back, and they kind of had to fit into that role and play a new style of basketball where it's a lot of throwing into the post and playing out of the post. Credit to them for being able to adapt to that sort of game, as well.

Q. Micah and Rueben, touching again on Coach Hartman, what makes him such an effective coach of big guys and how has he managed to develop you guys? In particular any drills or anything you remember?

MICAH HANDLOGTEN: I'd say the way he goes about it. He knows that we all have so much respect for him and that's why we came to Florida, to get coached by him. I think he knows how to coach each and every one of us personally. Different players require different type of coaching in order to see how you respond. And I think he's been really good at separating tough coaching on the court from being very personable off the court.

He'll have us over for dinner and we'll hang out with him. But on the court he's going to coach you very, very hard.

RUEBEN CHINYELU: What I would say about Coach Hartman is it's just wonderful working with him because he sees you. He knows what you are capable of doing, and he's going to push you to be there because he knows that you can do this and there's no reason not for you to be there. He's just going to push you every day as a coach, as a father. He's going to be there to make sure he puts you in the right spot.

You might not like it, but at the end of the day you'll look back on that he appreciates you and be like I'm glad that he pushed me, that he made me get better, he made me a better person, a better man. So kudos to him.

Q. As the reigning champions, repeating is done so rarely. How have you handled the pressure or have you felt any pressure to do it again?

ALEX CONDON: Yeah, I think we've just got to take one game at a time. There's a lot of expectations coming into the year for us, and I know I felt that early on with the amount of pressure and the strength of schedule we had really early. We were 5-4 at the start of the season and people were second-guessing us, just saying all these different things.

Like they're saying now, we're the easiest 1 seed to take out, and after we lose a game, a lot of people are quick to switch up. I think we just do a good job of using it as motivation. We've got to go out there and try and win six in a row. We've got to take every practice, every game, every time we're all together as a group -- we can't take it for

granted because we don't know what's going to happen next year with guys leaving, going to the NBA, stuff like that. I know I'm just going to take it every day I get with these boys, just go take it.

RUEBEN CHINYELU: What I would say, reigning champions, to me, and I think to every other person on my team, that's not -- because it's off the table. This is a new season. We're in March Madness right now. It's about playing and trying to get your win and move on. I don't think we care about that. We just care about this present right now and about this new group, trying to go achieve a bigger dream that we all have.

So I think that's our mindset and we approach it each game at a time, and just doing that and enjoying all that and creating all these memories.

Q. Todd is not one to overreact. You guys had some incredible comebacks this year. What has been his consistent message for Tommy and Alex this week coming after that game this week.

THOMAS HAUGH: Just to get back to who we are. The problem we ran into this year was turnovers. He gave us this one stat, I don't remember how many turnovers, but like 10-6 in games we had this amount of turnovers, and 16-1 in games we had this amount of turnovers. So that's going to be crucial, especially coming into tomorrow's game.

We know Prairie View is really scrappy, they're going to dig down in the post, and stuff like that. So just take of the ball -- this entire tournament, taking care of the ball is going to be a huge focus for us.

ALEX CONDON: I think for the turnovers, it was when we have 12 or less, yeah, we have that record that Tommy just said. We've just got to take care of the ball. That's the main thing that Todd is relaying to us. Because every time we get a shot up on the rim, we have three guys crashing the glass, three guys in the paint. Every time is what they preach.

We've just got to take care of the ball, and like Tommy said, Prairie View is a good team. We've got to respect them. We can't go in just cruising. I think we did that a little bit against Vanderbilt just expecting to win. These are all good teams we're playing and they're here for a reason. We've just got to take it in our stride.

Q. Alex and Tommy, how have you guys grown as leaders during the course of the season and how important is that going to be to continue during this stretch to get back to where you guys want to go?

THOMAS HAUGH: I mean, I think all the guys you see up here are leaders we have on this team. I'm definitely not the most vocal guy on the team, but I think I just try to lead by example, just do the right things off the court, do the right things on the court. And I think all four of these guys do the same thing as me, represent the school well off the court and do things that embody a good leader on the court, too.

ALEX CONDON: Yeah, just being able to hold everyone accountable, especially at practices. You practice how you play, is what Coach says all the time. So we've got to have elite practices. And then if I'm seeing anything out there, I'll talk to Coach, plays that we can run, any defensive schemes, just stuff that I have out on the court, just to get the group in a huddle and have a chat to them, let guys explain what they're seeing, too.

I think communication is key. Listen to everyone and just lead by example, too.

Q. For all of you guys, obviously being there, making it to the Final Four last year, winning the championship, how have you kind of talked to the new guys like Boogie and Xaivian and given them advice coming into the tournament this time?

RUEBEN CHINYELU: I would probably say talking to them, just letting them know just stay in the moment, be in the moment, don't get too high, don't get too low, just be right there in the middle and enjoy it. Enjoy it, enjoy playing it. You deserve to be there, you deserve whatever is coming your way, so we should go out there and do what we have done throughout the course of the season, which is being together, playing together, enjoying each other, and everything will align.

MICAH HANDLOGTEN: To build off that, I'd say we told them to just embrace it, live in the moment. You're living like a little kid's dream right now. So just take every game day by day and don't think too far ahead because then you'll be out of the moment.

I think that these guys have also -- they've both won games in March Madness before, whether that be at Princeton or Arkansas. I think that just like having us there to kind of just tell them what it's like to keep playing, I think that's really helped them, just with their mentality and their focus.

Q. You've been good in the past at getting them to flush what happened in the past that was negative. Tell us how you've done that and worked on that this week, or has it just been the same ol' same ol'?

TODD GOLDEN: Well, we had a really good week of practice. I think when you have a bad game like we did last Saturday, you've got to use it as a learning experience and try to find ways to improve, and I think we did that. I think we highlighted some areas that we haven't been very good over the last week and addressed that this week in practice and competed really well.

My hope is that we'll be able to address those areas and play better this weekend.

Q. Todd, you guys were able to get away from everybody last year in Raleigh and out on the West Coast and then more obviously attention in San Antonio. But playing in Florida, an hour and a half from home, the cameras in the locker room, all that stuff is different. How do you handle that and how have you seen them embrace being able to stay close to home?

TODD GOLDEN: Yeah, I think anytime you have the opportunity to play at home in the NCAA Tournament, it's a huge advantage. There might be a few more distractions, but I don't think that's anything that our team can't handle. We're just really excited to be able to play in our home state and play in front of a lot of Gators tomorrow night and hopefully do what we need to do to take care of business to do it again on Sunday.

We'd much rather play in a place like Tampa than get on a plane and have to play somewhere else.

Q. It's amazing to think that Alex and Tommy, this is going to be their third NCAA Tournament, going all the way back to when they were freshmen. Just the value of that experience and how you challenge them to kind of lead as you go forward here.

TODD GOLDEN: Yeah, obviously they're great players. They're great people. They're great leaders for our program.

I think they've been able to experience March in many different ways. Obviously disappointing our first year in the tournament, losing a really tight game against Colorado. And then obviously last year running the table and cutting down the nets.

They've experienced a wide range of experiences and emotions in the tournament. And I feel like they've done a really good job of kind of leading our guys over these last couple days, especially the guys that weren't in our program last year and the guys that didn't play a big role on our team, in terms of getting them prepared to compete in March.

Q. Watching Prairie View last night, what did you see from them that you found interesting?

TODD GOLDEN: They have a really good team. I think obviously Coach Jones does a great job. He's been there for a long time. They're always going to be gritty. They're going to be tough. They have a unique style defensively where they get after you and try to turn you over, and they're old. They're mature, they're old, they play six seniors. A couple of those guys are grad school guys.

We don't anticipate them being afraid of the moment or being scared coming into the game. We think they're going to be ready to compete, and looking forward to the opportunity for this game tomorrow night.

We have a great level of respect for them and for their ability to beat Lehigh in a quick turnaround coming down here, and we have to be ready to play and do a really good job tomorrow night.

Q. I remember in Indianapolis you talked about how quickly this can end, and you saw it against Colorado. How do you guard against guys maybe being comfortable after last year, kind of expecting we're going to move on because we're Florida?

TODD GOLDEN: We talk about it a lot, and I'll be really disappointed if our guys have any sort of comfort going into this tournament. I want our guys to be confident and go out there and compete the right way, but this is not the time of year to be comfortable or to get here and just expect things to go our way.

Talking about the SEC tournament, I think that was a good reminder of that, and again, a great opportunity for us to learn from some mistakes that we made last week.

I believe our guys will be ready to go for this event.

Q. Adjusting to another new arena, a bigger arena, you went through that in Nashville. How do you account for that in terms of the shootaround coming up and how do you think you'll respond to that?

TODD GOLDEN: Yeah, we're just going to get a lot of shots today. We had a good practice off-site this morning, so we're not going to spend much time on anything too technical out here today. We've got 40 minutes, we're going to get a lot of shots up, and hopefully our guys get comfortable. We get 20 minutes tomorrow at a decent time, so we'll use that, as well.

And it's not like Prairie View gets any more time than we



do. So it's going to be a mutually equal opportunity that way, and it is what it is. There's a lot of conversation around the NCAA Tournament with inflated basketballs or tough shooting environments, but it's also part of why we build our team the way we do. And we don't want to have to be reliant on hot shooting to win games.

We want to be a team that defends and rebounds really well and values the basketball and allows that to raise our floor.

Q. Does it ever seem a little bit surreal to you that you were an assistant at Columbia and then working for Bruce, and in just seven years you've already won a National Championship and you've got a program that is well on the way to being considered one of the truly elite programs in the country?

TODD GOLDEN: You know, I'm definitely really proud of it. I'm proud of the journey that we've had in going from Columbia to Auburn to San Francisco, and just incredibly fortunate that four years ago I got the opportunity to become the head coach here.

I'm surrounded by great people in our administration and on campus, and I feel like we have turned into one of the better programs in America and trying to be consistent that way and compete really well every night.

We're going to keep doing this as long as we can, and I think as long as we continue to recruit the right guys in our program and have a really strong staff, we'll be able to do it. But it is -- it's surreal. I think it's awesome. But we worked really hard to get here, and we're going to do everything we can to continue operating at this level.

Q. Coach Hartman the last three years and his development, obviously best front court in America doesn't happen overnight, and the work he's put in in terms of that and how he's developed the guys.

TODD GOLDEN: Yeah, Carlin is one of the best coaches in America, especially his ability to work with guys on the floor. But his secret sauce is his ability to have real relationships with our guys.

I think a lot of people are good technically on the floor, and he's one of the best that way in the way he works with our bigs.

But the reason why our guys play so hard for us, specifically why they enjoy working with Carlin so much is because they know he cares about them. He's constantly there as a role model, someone that they can bounce things off of, and he's just a great relationship guy. He

means a lot to our program. He's one of our biggest strengths.

We've also done a good job recruiting really talented front court players that make him a better big man coach, also. It's mutually beneficial. But we're really lucky to have him, and he's a guy that, as I said, is one of the better coaches in America.

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