

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

Friday, March 20, 2026

Tampa, Florida, USA

Benchmark International Arena

Florida Gators

Coach Todd Golden

Rueben Chinyelu

Boogie Fland

Media Conference

Florida 114, Prairie View A&M 55

TODD GOLDEN: Really pleased with the way our players performed tonight. I thought we did a really good job of just executing and playing with great intent from start to finish. We didn't do a good job the first couple minutes guarding the three-point line, and once we righted that, we accomplished what we needed to, played with great intent offensively, 29 assists, only seven turnovers, controlled the glass the way we hoped to, and just played really efficient basketball on both sides.

Q. For both players and Rueben, you first, coming off of the SEC tournament now, did you have a renewed sense of, we've got to get this done?

RUEBEN CHINYELU: I would just say, just coming off that, we didn't play our best. That wasn't us. We didn't value the ball. We didn't take care of the ball. That's what you get when you don't take care of stuff like that.

So I thought that wasn't us and we didn't do what we needed to do, so just coming off that, just knowing that in order to proceed to the next round, you have to fight for the game, which is to our advantage, taking care of the ball, playing with each other and just making good decisions and paying attention to the tendency and scout.

I think we just emphasized that and do what we do, come out and play our game, which whenever we do that, we're better.

BOOGIE FLAND: We didn't control what we could control, so I felt like we had to come back, regroup, and get our



minds back right.

Q. Rueben, a huge team win and you set the school double-double record. How did you manage to control the game and your teammates controlled the game from that aspect, and what does that record mean to you?

RUEBEN CHINYELU: Actually, I would say it means a lot because I got an email from the family when I tied with him, and it was really just beautiful to just see that. Just having them reach out to me and saying how they feel really good just hearing his name called again, so that's just a big thing to me, and I really respect that and value that.

I'm trying to just do whatever I can to just keep doing that and just paying homage to him. Just coming out there, doing whatever it takes to get us going, be it rebounding, defensively, offensively, just touching that aspect, be getting my team together, I enjoy doing that and I enjoy playing with these guys. You have to value each moment because moments like this fly by real quick. So just enjoy it, embrace it, and after that I think we are aligned.

Q. Rueben, you were getting really into the we want Ollie chants there from the crowd, getting engaged. Can you talk about the relationship you guys have, the bond of that front court, and whether you played a little bit harder in the second half knowing he might have a chance to get in the game?

RUEBEN CHINYELU: It's just a great time just being with this guy, be it from summertime, grinding with this guy, playing together, trying to get each other better. Just trying to do whatever to get him to play the game because we all worked so hard for that, so whatever time, seconds he gets, cherish that.

I just want to see everybody win, see everybody enjoy it, do whatever we can to just make sure everybody gets to feel that moment being on the court playing with each other.

Just me seeing him being able to step up there, go in there, dunk the ball, make points, it's really -- you could see everybody enjoyed it. Anytime we get to -- anytime we're playing and we can set up an opportunity to get our guys



in, we really do that because that's what we do because they grind.

You guys don't see behind the scenes. They get ready, they're getting us ready, they're playing with us, trying to make sure we have what we need to deliver. I think that's the gift of -- I would say the time to give them, to repay them as a thank you for what you guys doing.

Just going out there and doing because they get us better and then we go out there and perform. Doing that is like you guys got to say without you guys we can't be here, so it's all rubbing off each other.

Q. As defending national champions, you guys are by definition the team to beat. What kind of statement do you feel like you guys made tonight, and how do you build on this?

BOOGIE FLAND: I mean, I felt we made a big one. We knew we were good coming out here. We saw the couple games before us, the 1-16, so to set that record I felt like it was big and a statement to the world for sure.

RUEBEN CHINYELU: I would say defending champion, that's history. I would say like everybody could be on the same page as me telling that we don't care about that one. That one is gone. This is a new team so we're just going out there because the championship is right there to grab.

So we're just taking each game at a time, going out there, knowing we need to step out there, play your game, enjoy each moment. And it's one game at a time, so we just take it one game at a time. Baby step, move, move, so once you step, you move. That's I think our mindset. Past championship is back in history, so we're trying to do something, play together, enjoy the moment, create memories, and I think our mindset is just take it a game at a time.

Q. Boogie, after last weekend in Nashville, how good was it -- the team was so well connected, both ends of the court today. It seemed like you guys just -- from the time it was 15-15, there was a lot of joy in the ways you guys were playing today?

BOOGIE FLAND: For us we had to get back to who we are. I felt like we lost ourselves, not controlling what we can control, and just that practice and just everything after that, we got back to who we are. That's why you saw the joy back on the court.

Q. Coach, Iowa coming up, Ben plays a very deliberate style of offense. How do you go about preparing for that off a game where you guys had offense

free-flowing pretty much the entire game?

TODD GOLDEN: Honestly, I've not thought a lot about Sunday yet. We just finished playing 15 minutes ago. We'll get back, we'll eat, we'll rest, and we'll get to work on that tomorrow.

But yeah, it definitely will be a battle of tempo, a battle of pace, and obviously Ben is a great coach. Bennett is a great player. They've played really good basketball, and it's going to be a great challenge for us.

Q. Would you talk about how well you shared the ball tonight. The ball moved well, unlike it was in Nashville. This time the ball just moved very, very well all the way around.

TODD GOLDEN: Yeah, I thought our biggest issue in Nashville was just ball security more than anything else, and I thought tonight we did a really good job of limiting our turnovers and playing together and just making the simple plays. We call it hitting singles, taking what the defense gives us and living with that.

Early on, I think we had a 38-0 paint advantage in the first half scoring-wise, so we weren't settling, we were getting good shots, and I thought we played with great purpose all night. I was really proud of our guys that came in off the bench the last 10 minutes. They didn't let it slip. Our young guys played great and really kept us in our offense and were solid defensively for the most part.

Collectively it was a really good effort from a lot of guys tonight.

Q. Coach, this may be an oversimplification, but last year in the tournament you were the hunter. This year you're one of the top 4 seeds. You're a hunted. Does that cause different mentality among your players, getting ready for that?

TODD GOLDEN: Well, we were a No. 1 seed last year, too, so at this point in the year, we had become the hunted.

I thought early on in the tournament it was an issue for us. I didn't think we played great in Raleigh last year and then we started playing better throughout the rest of the year.

This team has experienced a lot of different emotions that way. This year we were the hunted early on. We didn't play great. I feel like we kind of fell off people's radars and we got back to being the underdogs and the hunters, and fast forward, we got back to that 1 seed line and then we had to adjust to that.

I thought in Nashville we were just okay that way, but I feel like our mentality has been really good since then. I thought we had a great week of productive practice. Like our guys said, we knew what we had to get back to doing. We are at our best when our identity is being a really gritty defensive team that cleans up the glass and gets out in transition, and when we do that, we're going to be tough to beat. We were able to do that tonight.

Q. I noticed you kind of chuckled when I brought up --

TODD GOLDEN: The definition?

Q. Yeah. Do you feel like -- yeah, maybe there's this top seed, No. 1 seed, but do you feel like you guys wanted to come out here and say, hey, we're here and we're ready to try to repeat?

TODD GOLDEN: Well, we needed to play better. Like, we had been playing great, and when you're winning, I feel like there's times where there's certain aspects or certain parts of your team or -- might not be as sharp as you want them to be, but it's hard to be too critical or focus on those things because you're just winning the games. I feel like that's what happened to us over the last couple weeks going into the conference tournament.

Obviously as we've talked about a lot back in Gainesville, we don't ever want to lose, to kind of learn from that and get better. We want to continue to win. But when you do, you've got to take some things from it and find ways to improve, and I think we did that this past week. Our guys were really attentive at practice. They did a really good job of focusing on the areas that we as a staff thought we needed to improve upon.

We played with great intent tonight, and when we do that, we're pretty tough.

Q. I know it's not the O Dome, but what was the environment like inside the arena, especially before the game leaving the hotel and having the Gator Walk out there?

TODD GOLDEN: Yeah, it was incredible, to be honest. I've talked to, whether it's my staff or our administration about we traveled a lot early in the year. We went out to Vegas, California, we were up in New York, and to be able to stay in Florida, a bus ride from campus to come here to Tampa is just fantastic for our program. The support that we receive here is incredible.

To your point, leaving the hotel, it was as good if not better than our hotel in San Antonio last year walking out for the championship game. It was incredible.

Then to walk on the floor and have a majority of our fans here and supporting us is a great advantage, and we really appreciate all the support that our fans have provided us over the season.

Q. Coach, from a coaching standpoint, was it hard to get the guys you needed to get the minutes they needed tonight with the way the score was?

TODD GOLDEN: You know what, I thought we were able to balance it really well. We were able to get out to a comfortable lead and it allowed us to keep everybody's minutes under 25, which when you only have a day rest in between, I think is really important.

So we should be really fresh on Sunday. We came out of it unscathed. We'll practice tomorrow, but I feel like we're in a really good spot going into Sunday from a health and from a freshness standpoint.

Q. A lot of great rebounders at Florida, but Rueben for 19 double-doubles. What does that say about him as a player, and what has his physicality meant during the course of the season?

TODD GOLDEN: Rueb is, as you know, just a fantastic player, a relentless worker and has just improved so much since he's got here to where he is now.

It's just really hard to wear him down. He does a great job of wearing his opponents down. In the first half when we started getting stops, it felt like he was getting every defensive rebound, he was getting good outlets and getting us out in transition. But 14 and 13, I thought he did a really good job of controlling the paint and staying aggressive on the glass, and he's at his best when he's playing that way.

Q. In your opening statement you said, once you got the three-point defense squared away; what did that entail? They probably weren't going to go shoot 70 percent from three the rest of the game.

TODD GOLDEN: Yeah, we didn't do a good job of being attached, and to their credit, they haven't been a team that has shot a lot of threes. They've been more kind of a mid-range or get-to-the-rim type team, and I think Condo was gapping a little bit too much and helping a little bit too much. I think he was probably responsible for some of those.

I thought X gambled on one, and then Micah was in a position in a ball screen coverage that he's not usually in, so maybe a little flukey. But to their credit, they knocked them down. I thought we were playing great, and I looked

up and it was 15-15.

It was addressed at that time-out, and we gave up 15 points in the first five minutes of the game, and then we gave up six points in the next 13 minutes of the game. So once we did a good job guarding the line, we knew it was going to be tough for them to finish over us at the rim, and our guys did a great job executing that defensive plan once we started guarding the line better.

Q. I've been with you since you've been here, and I can't remember an 18-0 run, a 10-0 run and a 17-0 run, not only in the same game but in the same half. Have you had anything like that before?

TODD GOLDEN: No, I don't think so. We've been a pretty good kill shot team all year. We started giving some up, which is really disconcerting, but obviously tonight we were better that way.

But we have the ability to go on some runs, and we're at our best when we do that. I have not been a part of a team that's put three together like that in a half. As I said, I thought our guys did a great job of staying mentally focused even when we got a big lead and playing the right way.

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