

Southeastern Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Thursday, March 9, 2023

Florida Gators

Nashville, Tennessee, USA

Bridgestone Arena

Coach Todd Golden

Riley Kugel

Kowacie Reeves

Postgame Press Conference

Mississippi State 69, Florida 68 OT

THE MODERATOR: We're ready to at this point with Florida. We'll ask Coach Golden for thoughts on the game, then take questions for the student-athletes, then we'll finish up with Coach.

Coach Golden.

TODD GOLDEN: Yeah, obviously a tough loss today for us. But with that being said, I was really proud of the way our guys continued to battle. Obviously didn't get off to a great start, down 14, six and a half minutes to go in the first half.

Obviously that could have gone one of two ways. We got that thing back to having a three-point lead with 13 minutes to go in the second half.

Thought we did a great job of finding our stride, especially on the offensive end, during that segment. Two chances at the end of regulation, then overtime to win that game. Came up a little short.

Considering what we've gone through in terms of Colin's injury, having to reinvent ourselves later in the season, incredibly proud of the strides these guys have made, the rest of our team, getting back to this level where we're competitive.

A team, Mississippi State, an important game for them to get to the NCAA tournament today. I thought we did a great job of doing everything we could to be the spoilers. I know our guys can hold their heads high after that effort today.



THE MODERATOR: Questions for the student-athletes.

Q. Hey, Kugel. Struggled a little bit shooting for the night. What were you able to do to stay with the system and keep making impact?

RILEY KUGEL: Yeah, like you said, I had a rough start shooting the ball. Taurean Green, he picked me up, he told me all about my game is scoring. I can facilitate, make plays for others. He said, Let the game come to you.

I got full faith in all my teammates. I really just started facilitating. Whatever happened to me...

Q. What were the challenges with trying to deal with a guy like Smith in the low post when you guys are undermanned?

RILEY KUGEL: Yeah, I've been knowing Tolu in the past. Tolu is a great player. We knew we had to put a body on him. J, Symie, Fudge, they fought hard. The guards had a rotational blockout.

I just feel like the key was not letting him get deep paint touches. He kind of got that. That's really it.

KOWACIE REEVES: Yeah, I think that we just made it tough on him. He finished the game well. But I think our guys fought, like all our bigs got in there and made him earn it. At the free-throw line, we made him make a lot of free throws.

You got to tip your hat. They've got a lot of good players.

THE MODERATOR: We'll excuse the student-athletes and continue with questions for Coach.

TODD GOLDEN: Good job, guys.

Q. What were the options on the last play?

TODD GOLDEN: Yeah, obviously wanted to get the ball in the front court as fast as we could. Applied a little bit of that pressure. We couldn't get a catch with the run.



I thought Loft made a good play getting it right back to M.J. with a little bit of steam. Would have liked to get a little deeper penetration, then a pass.

With four seconds, the message is you got either two dribbles and one pass or three dribbles and a shot, and then you got to get that thing up. You would like a higher percentage shot only being down one. But you have to get one up, period. Got to live with it a little bit. Obviously to try to get deeper paint, too, in that situation.

At the end of the day, we got two of those up. You hope one of them falls to find a way to win that game.

Q. Talking about sort of the latter half of the first half and the second half, talk about the adjustments your team made defensively.

TODD GOLDEN: Yeah, I thought we did a really good job of limiting second chances in that stretch. I think they only had one offensive rebound the first 10 minutes of the second half. That's the whole deal against these guys. We were confident that we'd be able to have a pretty good first-shot defense against Mississippi State.

But their talent is on the glass, their athleticism, physicality, strength. Obviously we got out-rebounded by nine on the offensive glass.

We talked about it at halftime, we were down seven in terms of offensive rebounds. We were down 10, so that's seven points, basically. We told our guys if we could kind of limit their opportunities the second half, cut it down to two or three second chances, we would give ourselves a chance to win. We certainly did that.

We needed one or two more defensive rebounds to finish that job. That's really where the difference was. We held them under 40% all game. Sent them to the line a little too much. Our defense and first shot was good. Again, we got beat up on the boards a little bit.

Q. (Question regarding the NIT.)

TODD GOLDEN: Yeah, absolutely. Any time you get an opportunity to compete, you better step up and grab it. As long as I'm the head coach at Florida, we'll compete.

We're excited to see. I think we have a great shot to make it, getting to 16 wins, having a top 10 strength of schedule in the country, wins against Tennessee, wins on the road against Mississippi State, at home against Missouri. We have a lot of things we can hang our hat on. We were trending to be a tournament team prior to Colin's injury.

We'll be prepared for whatever happens on Sunday.

Q. I know you're still trying to process, but looking at the season as a whole, where do you feel y'all have grown the most?

TODD GOLDEN: I think we've become as a program a lot more competitive. We weren't very good at it early in the year. Thought we had moments where we didn't push through, do a great job that way.

But over the course of the back half of December into our conference schedule, I thought we did a fantastic job that way. Obviously took us a little bit to get over Colin's injury, figure ourselves out. We had a game or two where we weren't in a tight one late.

Other than that, you look at any game we had on our schedule in conference play, I thought we were in it to the wire. In most of those games we had a big deficit, we did a good job rallying back, finding a way to compete. I thought today was a great example of that as well. That level and understanding what it takes to keep yourself on the floor in our program.

In our program, you got to compete regardless of the results, be consistent that way. I thought our guys have done a really good job of growing that way over the course of the year.

Q. Just to build on you talking about how your team has grown. Myreon hit the last nine points to send the game into overtime. Talk about how he's grown throughout the season.

TODD GOLDEN: Yeah, he's done a good job, man. Our issue early on is we had a lot of guys that were beating each other out on any given day. Hard to separate. We had injuries with Will and Kyle early. Took us a little bit to figure out a rhythm. Myreon wasn't really in there this aggressively early on.

Once we got into conference, we felt like his leadership, the fact that he's been through it before, along with his skill, his ability to make a shot, make a pass, would really help us.

Him and Kyle have done a really good job anchoring that backcourt for us over the course of the year. So, again, he was huge for us in that Georgia win last weekend, 12 rebounds. He's done a really good job of doing 'the little things' to help us win. That's what you expect from a fifth-year senior.

Q. How does the adversity of Colin going down, kind



of seeing growth in you being able to reinvent yourself, help you all going forward, building the foundation?

TODD GOLDEN: Yeah, well, obviously Colin was instrumental on both sides of the ball for us. So he gets out. Now it's not like losing a guy where your bench needs to pick it up. This is losing your leading scorer, the anchor offense your defense. Two through 13 have to step up and take on more responsibility and roles.

We weren't ready to do that against Arkansas. I thought we competed against Kentucky. At Vanderbilt we didn't do a great job.

Getting into the last week of our schedule, everybody just lifted each other. Starting with that Georgia game, everybody picked each other up, shot it well, we were competing to finish defensively. Thought we did a great job that way second half against LSU and thought we did a great job today for the most part.

It was that opportunity that was provided to others. We had to obviously ask a lot more out of everybody. It took us a little bit to figure it out. But I think we got back there for the most part.

Again, this is a team we're playing today, life-or-death game to play in the NCAA tournament. I think they won seven out of the last eight, playing one of the best teams in the league. We gave them all they wanted, had a one-point lead with 10 seconds to go. I was proud with the effort our guys showed.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

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