

# Southeastern Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Friday, March 15, 2024

## Florida Gators

Nashville, Tennessee, USA

Bridgestone Arena

## Coach Todd Golden

## Walter Clayton Jr.

## Tyrese Samuel

### Postgame Press Conference



Florida 85, Georgia 80

THE MODERATOR: We're ready to begin with Florida. We'll ask Coach for a few general thoughts on the game, then take questions.

Coach.

TODD GOLDEN: Incredibly proud of our team for this win tonight. A lot of things didn't go our way, especially early. I thought our guys did a great job staying the course. We were a little dejected at halftime I thought. We came out and settled ourselves down even though Georgia made a good run at the beginning of the second half.

Again, just continued to try to keep things simple. Finally stepped up and made some free throws, got some stops. That allowed us to get out in transition and get some easier baskets than we were getting in the first half.

Tournament time, neutral sites. Our first time in this building with a short warm-up, I thought under the circumstances we performed relatively well. I'm really excited for this contest tomorrow night against Alabama.

THE MODERATOR: We'll take questions for either of the student-athletes.

#### **Q. Tyrese, how did you fight through mentally the anguish of what was going on at the free-throw line?**

TYRESE SAMUEL: To be honest, I wasn't even thinking about it all. I missed already. At this point I just got to go over there and make 'em. That was my mindset the whole time. Just kind of like slow down. In the second half, just slow down and take your time, hopefully they'll fall - today

at least.

#### **Q. Walt, what was the message at halftime?**

WALTER CLAYTON JR.: Coach made it very clear we was losing on the rebounding front. Obviously was fouling a lot. Defend without fouling was the big thing, getting back on the boards. I think we did a good job of that the second half, rebounding.

#### **Q. Walt, can you go over what happened on that steal.**

WALTER CLAYTON JR.: He just threw the ball away, threw it to me. I grabbed it, took off. Fortunately the ref called a foul.

#### **Q. When Zyon Pullin went out and fouled out, what was your mindset to take this team on your back?**

WALTER CLAYTON JR.: I think all around we just got a great team. I've always had a mindset of just next man up. Things happen, you got to be able to play through them. Obviously ZP going out, that's a big part of our team, as far as what he does, facilitating the ball, getting us shots.

So just trying to put myself in his shoes a little bit, run the team, put the ball in the basket, get some good looks, not turn it over.

#### **Q. How important was this win after the way regular season ended at Vanderbilt?**

WALTER CLAYTON JR.: I think it's very important. I was telling the guys today, it's very tough to beat a team three times in a row. It don't matter who it is. Beating a team three times is tough.

I was telling them we got to go out there and be the tougher team. I definitely think it was very important.

TYRESE SAMUEL: Kind of like what he said. Beating a team three times in a row is really hard. We have to earn it. They're trying to win games, too, like how we are. Just got to come out and play harder. Came out with the outcome today.



**Q. The night-and-day nature of the rebounding in the first half and second half, was it what your coach said? Because it looked like some of the last couple games.**

TYRESE SAMUEL: Yeah, most definitely. Rebounding was the emphasis this week. We worked on it a lot. I think, like, coming into the second half, it was really important 'cause especially for the bigs, nothing was really falling for us close to the rim. I feel like us rebounding helped us get our mojo back.

It was key.

**Q. Tyrese, scoring in the paint in the second half, how important was that?**

TYRESE SAMUEL: It was important. Just getting the easy lays. In the beginning we weren't making 'em. Taking our time, playing off of two, shot faking, game foul, getting and-ones, whether it was Will, me, Condo, even the guards as well. It was really important staying poised and making these layups at the end of the second half.

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

**Q. What was the message regarding attacking the 2-3?**

TODD GOLDEN: What was the message?

**Q. Yes. What changed?**

TODD GOLDEN: We were obviously able to get into the middle of it pretty easily. As the first half wore on, that's what they were hoping we would do, settle for those 12-foot push flows that we were taking. Reese and Condo missed three or four of them in a row.

First of all, we weren't playing with their guards in the paint, which has been a really good formula for us all year. Again, we weren't putting pressure on the rim enough to get to the foul line. That was the gamble they were willing to take, allowing us to take some of those shots. We weren't capitalizing.

In the second half we wanted to get it a little deeper. The biggest difference was we got on the glass. That was the biggest key. We had 16 total, so 12 offensive rebounds in the second half; was the difference of the game, really.

We didn't shoot the ball well in the second half either around the rim. I don't feel we finished very well. The second-chance opportunities allowed us to make some and get to the line.

I really feel like the way we put pressure on the glass in the second half changed the complexion of the game.

**Q. What was the mood at halftime and your message?**

TODD GOLDEN: We were, like I said, a little dejected, disappointed. We came out with great energy. I thought our prep all day was awesome, our walk-through was fantastic. Guys were juiced before the game. We got off to a good start. We were up by nine with 10 minutes to go in the first half. Playing pretty well.

We fell into a little bit of a funk. Credit to them, they bled us down to the point where we were down three at halftime. We had all this energy, playing really well, next thing you know we're down three. Maybe a little bit of doubt crept in from last week losing at Vandy.

As a coaching staff, we have to calm our guys down. We're amped up to play in this setting, which we want to be that way. But we're making uncharacteristic mistakes, not just keeping it simple and letting the game come to us that way.

At halftime we wanted to calm down a little bit, stay the course. We were 4 for 13 from the foul line in the first half. Make a couple more free throws, we're probably tied or a little bit of an advantage with the lead.

It didn't go our way the first five or six minutes of the second half either. I think they got it up to eight at one point. Once we started getting some stops and clean rebounds, it allowed us to get out in transition a little bit. Ended up making a few free throws for that stretch, which allowed us to capture the lead. We didn't let it go after that point.

**Q. You just said getting out in transition. You outscored them 23 to 9 in fast-break points. How much of that was an emphasis?**

TODD GOLDEN: That's our team. We played fast all year. Transition has been really good for to us. We're always trying to push and get really good shots at the rim or catch-and-shoot threes within the first six seconds of the shot clock.

That's something that we strive to do. I think their zone slowed us down a little bit that way. But conversely, on our defensive end, we try to take away transition from teams. That's our key as well.

Going into every game, it's similar that way. Georgia is not exactly the most explosive team in transition. They want to

kind of grind you out in the halfcourt, make you chase them around and guard. They're hard to guard that way.

The transition showed up especially late, once we started getting some clean rebounds and clean stops. The play that Chris referenced where Walt got that steal breakout and one layup, that was a huge, huge play, gave us a little separation down the stretch.

**Q. If you would allow me a big-picture college basketball question. From an offensive-minded perspective, what do you think has been the impact of the change to the block charge?**

TODD GOLDEN: I mean, it's a very simple answer. Like scoring is up, fouls are up a little bit, free throws are up a little bit. Honestly, it's probably a good change for the game. Those plays are bang, bang. The reality is it's really hard for any human to get them right in real time.

As an official, taking that out of the game is -- for the officials, I should say, makes their lives a little easier. They don't have to be perfect in those situations.

It's just not exactly a very great, clean basketball play when guys are always trying to slide under guys as they're going up in the air to the rim.

I think it's probably for the best that they're not calling those anymore.

**Q. Can you speak to Riley stepping up and making those free throws late.**

TODD GOLDEN: They were huge obviously. Goes without saying. He did a good job against pressure making himself available, being strong with the ball, getting fouled.

Sometimes you take it for granted when guys make free throws late, but those are huge. Every single one of them kept the game from being a one-possession game late, and the type of step-up effort that you need down the stretch to close out a game like tonight.

But proud of him for in that moment being able to step up and knock those free throws down.

**Q. (No microphone.)**

TODD GOLDEN: Because they tried to sub a guy in without the clock running.

**Q. The poise that you guys had without ZP on the floor, talk about the performance without him on the floor.**

TODD GOLDEN: Yeah, obviously not a situation we've been in at all this year. Actually our first three games. After that he's been out there for about 37 minutes a night.

Again, I thought our perimeter in that moment, which was Walt, Will and Riley, did a great job of just, like Walt said, next man up. We knew what the situation was. There was nothing we could do to change it at that moment. We had two options: hang our head and complain and feel sorry for ourselves or step up and realize we needed some guys to make some big-time plays being down in that moment like we were.

All those guys did a great job of keeping their composure, not getting too frustrated or upset once that lead went the wrong way. That group did a really good job defending over that stretch. I think that allowed us to come back and grab that lead.

**Q. You may be personally responsible for knocking Georgia out of any post-season. What do you think it is about the way you match up with them, how they play you?**

TODD GOLDEN: I mean, we're a very good team. I think we're tough for a lot of teams to match up. We've had an advantage against them inside all year. In the first game we got on the glass. We've won the rebounding battle in all three games. I think that would be the easiest way to say. Plus 16 on the glass tonight. I know we had great offensive rebounding numbers in the first two matchups.

We didn't do as good a job finishing around the rim tonight, which was disappointing. That was something we'd been really good at against them.

All three ended up being somewhat close. Obviously the first one we were up big and did a poor job handling success late. At their place we had to come back, down six at halftime. Tonight we had to come back a little bit.

They're a tough team. They do a good job running their stuff. They're hard to guard. They make you chase 'em. If you have mental lapses defensively, they'll carve you up a little bit. Again, I thought we did a really good job down the stretch of staying the course, defending without fouling, making them take tough twos over us.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

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