

Southeastern Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Sunday, March 17, 2024

Florida Gators

Nashville, Tennessee, USA

Bridgestone Arena

Coach Todd Golden

Zyon Pullin

Tyrese Samuel

Postgame Press Conference



Auburn 86, Florida 67

THE MODERATOR: We're ready to begin with Florida. We'll ask Coach for some general comments, then take your questions.

Coach.

TODD GOLDEN: Yeah, obviously a disappointing outcome for us today. First and foremost, I'm incredibly proud of my team. I feel like they've done a great job just fighting and staying the course. We didn't play our best today, but our effort was there, our intent was there, our heart was in the right place, head in the right place. Just ran into a team that was playing really, really well. They just beat us today.

That's okay. It happens. We'll kind of dust ourselves off and get back up and get ready for the NCAA tournament. Obviously disappointing. I feel for Micah. Obviously he fractured his leg.

Our program is really appreciative of our medical staff, the SEC medical staff, and even Auburn's group for how quickly they responded, comforted him, were able to kind of get him under control, take care of him. We're thankful for that.

I think he'll probably have surgery later today, tonight. Hopefully he will have a quick and speedy recovery.

Tough one for us today. Again, for us to get to this championship game this year, to knock off the teams we did, still incredibly proud of our team. I'm excited to get back on track for the tournament next week.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for either of the student-athletes.

Q. How difficult was it to regroup and catch your bearings after what happened to Micah so early in the game?

ZYON PULLIN: I mean, yeah, it's definitely tough to see him go down like that, a guy like that, stuff like that. We just tried to rally together and kind of focus on staying together. We were going to check on him after the game.

TYRESE SAMUEL: Yeah, like Micah is so valuable for our team, especially on the offensive rebounding side of things. Losing him early kind of affected us a little bit. We were trying to win the championship for him. We really care about him. He's part of our family.

We going to go out there next week and keep on playing for him, so...

Q. This is your fourth game in four days. How did you feel out there fatigue-wise?

TYRESE SAMUEL: Like obviously we're tired. Also Auburn, they're tired, too. They probably played one less game than us. Everybody is tired. A lot of basketball in a short period of time.

At the end of the day, it's about grinding it out. It's March. Not a lot of rest time in between. We have to come ready to play. Today, Auburn came and did that.

ZYON PULLIN: I mean, kind of the same thing with him. I mean, definitely tough playing four games. They had to play three. Just trying to dig deep. Championship on the line. Got to dig from within, so...

Q. Defensively what does Auburn do that causes so much problems? Did the fatigue set in with shooting three-pointers?

TYRESE SAMUEL: Yeah, probably. Like they're very aggressive. In passing lanes, they push you off your spot. It disrupts offense. A really good offensive team.



Yeah, like obviously the fatigue got to us a little bit. We're just going to bounce back, go back to practice, go back to the drawing board, make sure we come prepared for whoever we're going to play next week.

ZYON PULLIN: I thought they did a good job being physical, making our looks tough. I mean, they're converting on the other end some of the stuff. Did a good job on some of the stuff.

We just got to find ways to learn from it.

Q. What needs to happen now in terms of flushing this and regrouping, moving forward with the tournament approaching?

ZYON PULLIN: Knowing we got one more game promised, I think it's just staying together. Learn from this. Give ourselves the best chance to win and go on a run here.

TYRESE SAMUEL: It's like a new season now. Nothing matters from before pretty much. Just kind of going into practice, finding new tactics and ways just to complement each other without Micah.

Yeah, just go out there and play hard. I feel like when we play hard, rebound, play in transition, I feel like we're one of the best teams in America.

Q. Tyrese, how do you feel like you did offensive rebounding? Even without Micah, you still won that battle today.

TYRESE SAMUEL: Yeah, we still did pretty good. We still pursued the ball pretty well. But I feel like our defensive rebounding, they were scoring a lot, and our defense wasn't there today. That's all right. We'll be back. We'll get back.

THE MODERATOR: We'll excuse you and continue with questions for Coach.

Q. Is Micah likely going to be staying in the hospital tonight, or is that information you don't have yet?

TODD GOLDEN: I don't know exactly.

Q. When that happens in a game, how hard was that to overcome? What was the immediate message after it occurred?

TODD GOLDEN: Yeah, I mean, it's not something you can necessarily prepare for. It kind of took the wind out of our

sails a little bit. The biggest part is that Micah has good relationships with his teammates. Those guys love him. He's an incredible teammate. Even when he's not playing his best, he has great energy on the bench, is always supporting all the guys on the floor.

Losing him so early to such a serious injury, just human nature took over a little bit. Guys were emotional. We had guys, whether it was players or staff members, in tears on the sideline, just trying to kind of compose ourselves.

Having that variable in the equation against one of the best teams in America is tough to deal with. We fought. I thought we did a good job of trying to compete. Got it down to one in the second half early on.

We didn't play our best. We didn't shoot the ball very well. Fatigued or not, Auburn just played very well. I thought they were just simply the better team today.

Q. Your optimism is always out front. Is this going to hurt that? How are you going to move on mentally from this? What is the message going to be?

TODD GOLDEN: Yeah, it's tough, man, 'cause he's a great kid (tearing up). You just hate to see it for him because he does everything the right way. He works hard. That's a super fluky injury that you don't see very often in this game.

Especially when a young guy like him that's worked so hard to get to this point, playing in a big-time game like this, to go out that way, I just feel for him.

Q. You came out of the locker room with a 14-4 run. Do you feel like from there you ran out of gas?

TODD GOLDEN: We had an opportunity to compose ourselves at halftime a little bit. We kept it within eight. We got in there, I think we were able to take a breath and realize that we can still get back in this game, we're all right.

We came out playing that way. We were super aggressive, getting downhill in transition, putting pressure on the rim. Cut it to one. I can't remember exactly what happened in those possessions, but we missed some free throws, a couple turnovers that led to transition run-outs for them.

Once they kind of got that thing back up to eight or ten, felt like it was going to be hard to cut that lead back again.

It's one of those things, we've been fortunate enough to be able to come back from those deficits the past couple days.



But this is a different team, different level team than we played the last couple days. Even though we were able to get it to one, we just didn't play quite well enough, and we didn't have the ability to keep at it that way.

Again, they took advantage of our mistakes, like good teams do. Combination of us maybe not having everything we need to get it all the way back, and them just not allowing us to do that was the difference.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

TODD GOLDEN: Thanks, guys.

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