

Southeastern Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Saturday, March 15, 2025

Nashville, Tennessee, USA

Bridgestone Arena

Florida Gators

Coach Todd Golden

Will Richard

Rueben Chineylyu

Postgame Press Conference

Florida 104, Alabama 82

THE MODERATOR: We are joined by Florida. At this time we will take opening comments by Coach Golden.

TODD GOLDEN: It's a great win for our program. I thought our guys did an incredible job just competing for 40 minutes. Carlin Hartman had the scout tonight again. He's had 'Bama scout. I thought on a short turnaround did an incredible job preparing our guys today for the challenge.

Incredible first half both ways. I thought both teams played really well. Some efficient basketball. Neither team could really get away from each other. It was really neck-and-neck the whole half.

I simply think our depth wore out in the second half, proved out in the second half. We were able to get into their bench a little bit. Our bench stepped up, allowed us to get some rest for our starters. We kept coming in waves in the second half. Thought we did an incredible job wearing them down.

That's one of the best teams in America we played today. The fact we were able to perform the way we did, I'm just really proud of our program, our players and our staff right now.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for the student-athletes.

Q. Will, obviously you were part of the team last year. Being able to get back to the finals, how much does that drive you to finish the job?

WILL RICHARD: Yeah, I mean, it's huge. Loss last year definitely hurt, Micah going down and stuff. Definitely huge



to be back at this stage and we definitely want to make it happen this year.

Q. Rueben, how did you feel about your performance today? How things were working for you down low, a lot of offensive rebounds?

RUEBEN CHINYELU: It feels good just to go out there and do what I've been practicing. Overall, I can't do it without my teammates. I'm just glad to be around them, get encouragement from them, keep pushing, keep being positive. Just a good thing being able to display that in this stage.

Q. How much of the emphasis was offensive rebounding in this matchup, coming off the game last night where you were challenged to step it up?

RUEBEN CHINYELU: It's something we've been doing all year long. It's just right to do it again. Yesterday we slacked back, so this time around we kind of touching up things and did what we have to do. That's what we do. That's our identity. We just have to get back on track.

Q. Will, coach spoke about the depth. Can you speak to Micah's performance coming back a year later, doing what he did.

WILL RICHARD: Yeah, I mean, it's been huge. Just seeing how much he's attacked the rehab and stuff like that, just working his way getting back. It's a blessing to see him out there. He provided such a spark for us off the bench.

Shows how deep of a team we are. With him coming back, it's giving us another level, another gear.

Q. Will, looking back to where you were as a freshman to where you are right now, how much more pride do you take in your defensive communication?

WILL RICHARD: Yeah, I think I've grown a lot. With the off-season stuff like that, the draft. My coaching have told me I've developed a lot, that's an area of my game that will



help me take my next jump. That's something I've definitely keyed in on and it's helped so far, so...

Q. Through the first 10 minutes, you were holding them to 19% shooting number one offense in the SEC. How did you do that?

RUEBEN CHINYELU: I would say we play collectively as a team, playing defense, doing what we had to do. Just making sure all communication was on points. I think that's what give us the edge.

WILL RICHARD: Like Rueben said, communicating, making sure we're on the right spots on defense. Just playing with intensity. Tried to make it uncomfortable, make them shoot tough shots. I think we did a great job of that.

Q. Second half, 15-2 run, took control of the game. What was working for you guys?

WILL RICHARD: For us it was playing with poise, playing our game. We got in transition. It really started with our defense. Once we got stops, it opened up transition. Once we did that, we knew we could get on a little run.

Q. This weekend you have had a few alley-oops. How much do you take pride in that?

WILL RICHARD: When they're going right, we definitely take pride in it. When they're going wrong, look at him and see him yelling (laughter). Definitely completing them telephone gets it going.

Q. Speaking of the 17-2 run, how do you maintain that killer mentality and stomp on their necks?

RUEBEN CHINYELU: Well, I would say it's about all what we do. We just been about being on tendency. We know what they're playing. We just trying to be on point on our defense, communicate, stick together, just get it going. I think one thing we feed off, as long as we are encouraging each other, talking to each other, when we are like that, we're at our best.

Q. Will, thoughts about getting Tennessee again in the final? Last time you played, they played a pretty strong defensive game. First time you shut them down. The third matchup...

WILL RICHARD: Yeah, I feel like it's been split during the regular season the way we played 'em. We're looking forward to that matchup. We know they're a great team, we're looking forward to the matchup tomorrow.

Q. Bennett Andersen's scoring?

RUEBEN CHINYELU: I will let him go first.

WILL RICHARD: We all can go. That's all I got to say (laughter).

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, gentlemen. We'll take questions for Coach Golden.

Q. This time of year you hear a lot of coaches talking about peaking at the right time. You seem to be doing that. Can you speak to everything that goes into the coalescence of a team playing this well at this time of year.

TODD GOLDEN: Obviously we've been playing pretty well all year. We ran into some injury issues in the middle of conference play. I think we were able to play well through them.

We were just a little out of sorts. We kind of got everybody back and healthy. I think Georgia game is an example of that. I think we've played five or six games since then. In every game since then, we played an insanely high level. I think condo getting back healthy, getting his legs back under him. Micah getting comfortable out there. Urby being able to be a rotational player for us allows us to get good depth and rest for our starting backcourt.

A game like today, we played at a very, very high level. We didn't have one guy play over 30 minutes. I think it really speaks to first of all the depth of our team, second just the unselfishness of our group. That is why we are who we are. We have good individual players. What makes this team special and gives us a chance to play deep into March and hopefully early April is our unselfishness, our willingness to make the extra pass. When it's opportunistic for other guys to take the shots, to move the ball to them.

We just have a very mature, unselfish group that way.

Q. Can you talk about the possibility of playing Tennessee tomorrow for the possibility to secure a 1 seed.

TODD GOLDEN: I think we are. I think we secured a 1 seed today. That's my opinion. We're second on KenPom right now. Beat 'Bama twice, beat Auburn at Auburn. I don't really think it's a debate regardless of the result tomorrow.

With that being said, another opportunity for us to get a really good win. Another big challenge. A team that I

would argue is one of the most physical and just tough-minded winning programs in America. Tennessee, obviously Rick Barnes is an amazing Hall of Fame coach. They got the best of us last time we played.

Our guys will be excited. We'll be ready to go. More than anything, it's just a great opportunity for us to get a championship.

Q. Their guards couldn't get much going offensively. What did you do, what was the game plan?

TODD GOLDEN: First half I thought we were just okay that way. They scored 45. In the second half I just think we wore them down. Mark is an incredible player. Labaron is a great freshman. Those guys are great off the balance, great in ball screens.

We felt like if they had to try to make every play, and we did a good job sticking the shooters, make them try to finish over size at the rim. That would give us a good chance.

Second half that's what I thought separated us, was the ability to guard in the ball screen and probability the rim. We had a couple really good blocks that turned into run-outs. Did a good job of finishing possessions after one shot, clean rebounds got us out in transition.

I just thought our ability to throw different looks. We went switch five a little bit. It was just okay. Making them see different defenses and different bodies I think wore them down a little bit.

Q. What was working so well coming out of second half when you went on the 17-2 run?

TODD GOLDEN: I just thought, again, war of a transition that way. We started wearing them down. We were able to get in transition, get a little confidence, a little momentum. It just seemed like we were able to keep our foot on the gas that way for the 12 minutes to start of half. 20-point lead with seven minutes to go.

Again, collective. Different guys made plays. I thought our bigs put pressure on the offensive glass. Our guards did a great job getting in the paint, making the right play, making big shots. Playing high-level basketball.

Q. There's been a lot of talk about you trying to secure the last 1 seed. With the way the results have played out, has the conversation in your opinion changed at all about getting a higher 1 seed?

TODD GOLDEN: Absolutely. Absolutely. Regardless of

the result tomorrow, I would say yes. We have four losses. 29-4 right now. We've won I think 11 out of the our last 12 or 10 out of our last 11, something along those lines. I think we have the best collection of high-level wins in college basketball across the board.

There's other good teams and candidates. When you look at the full body of work... Our conference schedule is different. We had to play some really good teams on the road, and we didn't get them at home. We were still able to get second.

With all those things together, I would say we're definitely 1 and have the chance to be the second or third 1 seed right now.

Q. Urby looks like he's getting comfortable out there, adjusting to the college game. What have you seen about him, strides he's made?

TODD GOLDEN: I think you hit it on the head. Simply getting comfortable. Coming over, unfortunately he missed the first couple games due to eligibility issues. Once he got eligible, we were playing very well. Denzel was playing great.

It was early in the year. Just not sure how deep we wanted to go in our rotation yet. When he was getting his short-minute reps, just wasn't a role that he had ever had to play before. It took him a little bit to get comfortable.

Towards the end of non-conference, once we got into conference play, really I point to Vanderbilt at home and at Auburn when it was like, all right, this guy has arrived. He's got comfortable, played incredible at Auburn, hit three big threes, guarded the ball really well. He's been playing at that level since.

Much better athlete than people would think. He's explosive off the bounce. Obviously an elite shooter. A much better defender than I thought he would be coming over.

Q. Last year you came up short in the tournament. What lessons did you learn from that loss that can be applied to tomorrow's game?

TODD GOLDEN: Yeah, I think from experience. We have a lot of guys back that were part of that loss. We had won three games in three days last year, lost to a very good Auburn team in the championship game.

Obviously we're a more mature group. A. Mart, Rueb, huge getting Micah back. Our team collectively I think is more ready for this type of situation and more ready to play



in a championship game.

With that being said, I think it's going to be incredibly difficult. Tennessee is playing well. This is a huge win they got today against Auburn.

Just from the experience of last year, this group is more ready for the opportunity to play for a championship tomorrow.

Q. I think Tennessee was the only team to hold you under 70 all season. The importance of dictating tempo, getting it up and down, the way you played against Alabama.

TODD GOLDEN: It's going to be interesting because both games were anomalies, for lack of a better term. We played fantastic and won by 30 against them at home. We go there, they beat us way worse than anybody else has been able to all year.

Losing Walt before halftime there definitely hurt us. We were down at three at halftime. We played poorly in the second half. They dictated with their physicality and defense.

I think tomorrow will be a battle of wills a little bit. We're going to get out in transition, open up the game a little bit. We know Tennessee likes to operate in the halfcourt, be physical defensively. Whoever is able to dictate the terms and the tempo I think has the best chance to win tomorrow.

Q. You mentioned being up number two. Walter is up to No. 4 as Player of the Year rankings. His game today was special.

TODD GOLDEN: Yeah, I mean, as you said, we know he's first team All-American, first one in Florida history, which is crazy. Just playing at an insanely high level.

For me, I just hope people just understand how gifted and talented he is and how much of a winner he is. I see all these mock drafts. Some places he's like late second round. I see all these guys that are mocked to be first. Winning has to matter. Leading has to matter. Being efficient has to matter. Being able to play the point guard position on the top two team in America has got to matter.

This guy deserves more recognition and credit than he's getting nationally. I wouldn't trade him for anybody in America. I think that says something for how good he is.

Some NBA team will figure it out. We'll add him to their roster and he's going to be a guy that plays 10 years in the NBA. We're going to be talking about him in four years,

how wasn't this guy not more highly touted coming out of college. I understand he is a senior.

Winning. Winning is pretty important, too. The guy has been the starting point guard on a 29-win team, playing an incredible floor game, 22.6 assists, no turnovers, three steals. Again, playing like the best point guard in America right now.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

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