

Southeastern Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Sunday, March 16, 2025

Nashville, Tennessee, USA

Bridgestone Arena

Florida Gators

Coach Todd Golden

Will Richard

Walter Clayton Jr.

Postgame Press Conference

Florida 86, Tennessee 77

THE MODERATOR: We are joined by Florida. We'll ask coach for a few comments on the game, then take questions.

TODD GOLDEN: Just incredibly proud of our program. Starts with our players. They've done an incredible job all year just being coachable and unselfish. We knew early on in the year we had really good talent. But the thing that separates us is our unselfishness, our willingness to put the greater good of the program in front of ourselves.

Our staff has done an incredible job all year. One of the best staffs in America, preparing our guys, being consistent, being good role models for these guys. The thing I'm most proud of is how well our guys compete whether it's going our way or not. They will always answer the bell and give it their best effort.

I'm really proud we can call ourselves SEC tournament champions.

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

Q. Will, what does this mean for you being a senior? For you guys to accomplish this in your final year of basketball, what are your emotions right now?

WILL RICHARD: It means a lot. I mean, what makes it so special is just the journey from me and coach's first year here to what we've been able to do now. It's a testament to all the work we've put in. It's good to see it come to fruition. We know we've still got a lot more ball to play.



Q. How did it feel to cut down the nets?

WILL RICHARD: That's my first time in college, so it definitely felt special.

Q. Walter? Shades of high school at all?

WALTER CLAYTON JR.: We didn't cut the net down in high school. They had games after us (smiling). No, it definitely felt great playing in one of the best conferences in the country. Obviously won Iona, MAC tournament. Second time cutting down nets in college.

Q. How doubtful to make the tournament team as well?

WALTER CLAYTON JR.: Feels great. You could have put any one of our guys on the team. You could have put anybody up there. Just feels great to be named to that team.

WILL RICHARD: Same thing. I feel like that award should go to the whole team. We all had a huge impact getting this done this weekend. It's just for the whole team.

Q. You said before Micah returned this season was for him. To see him out there cutting down the nets, contributing, how exciting is that for him?

WILL RICHARD: I mean, it feels like it's a testament to who he is. Micah comes in with great energy every day. He's worked his butt off to get back to playing and helping us on the court. Definitely a blessing to see him get out there and make an impact like that.

Q. What would the statement be to the NCAA Selection Committee from you guys?

WALTER CLAYTON JR.: Humbly, I don't think we got to say nothing (smiling).

WILL RICHARD: I'm right there with him (smiling).

Q. Will, you said you have a lot of ball left to play.



Cutting down nets, does it make you hungrier for what's next? How much of a motivator is it at this point? Coach said on the court feels like y'all can go win a national title now.

WILL RICHARD: For sure. For us, we're a hungry group. We know the main goal. This is definitely a motivator. Cutting down the nets is a great feeling, but we want to do it in the NCAA tournament as well.

Q. Senior Day legacy, but cool to leave a place better than what you found it. Can you enhance that statement.

WALTER CLAYTON JR.: Coach Golden, they had a vision. Obviously I committed here, I came here because I believed in that vision. See it come to fruition, it actually happening, is great.

I think me, Lij, Will, all the guys have made this better. I think staff has made this better as the year's been going on. I think it's just going to get better from here for the University of Florida.

Q. What do you feel like this tournament and the environment this weekend will prepare you for the big dance?

WILL RICHARD: I feel like it definitely gets us ready. This is one of the hardest conferences in the game of basketball. We won three straight. Definitely gets us ready for the tournament setting, gets us feeling what it's like for playing in the big tournament.

THE MODERATOR: Fellas, you can excuse yourselves. We'll continue with questions for Coach Golden.

Q. You said you wanted to come to Nashville and make a statement. What kind of statement do you feel you made?

TODD GOLDEN: Really I just think we continue to prove when we have been all season, which is being one of the best teams in America, continuing to show that we can beat anybody in America. When we're playing like this, I think we are the best team in America. We got to keep going.

Obviously that can change at any time. We got to have the mental toughness to keep pushing through, not be content and satisfied to what we've done to this point. This is a huge goal of ours to get the SEC tournament championship. We still have a lot left to do here in March and playing for the NCAA tournament as well.

Q. Do you have a preference where you want to play?

TODD GOLDEN: I'd say Raleigh first, then Lexington. Those would be my preferences.

Q. What's the mentality of celebrating this one and flushing it knowing you have bigger goals to accomplish? What was your message to the team in the locker room about staying humble?

TODD GOLDEN: I haven't gotten the chance to talk to the whole team yet.

I don't worry about being humble with this group very much. I think our whole staff and our whole team, we kind of consider ourselves underdogs. We don't find ourselves ever getting satisfied.

Again, this was part of our growth of our program, being able to compete for a championship last year, falling a little short, continuing to raise the level of our program in every facet, adding some players, players within our program continuing to grow, our staff growing tighter.

This was kind of the next jump for us, coming here and being able to win this tournament in what is the best conference in college basketball over the last 20 years.

Again, moving forward we're going to enjoy this one tonight. We're going to do it tonight. You got to enjoy the victories because it's very stressful profession, it's stressful just being in college basketball. There's a lot of heartache in college basketball as well. Enjoy this one tonight.

But tomorrow we'll get back together as a team. Obviously we'll figure out who we're playing here in a couple hours, start our preparation for hopefully playing on Friday.

Q. Are there any predictions for Sam Alexis coming in for the big dance?

TODD GOLDEN: Yeah, I think he'll be close to ready to go for the NCAA tournament. Obviously our front court is playing really well. I feel like we have a really good rotation right now with Micah being back.

There's always going to be a circumstance where you probably need another guy to come in and impact the game. I think Sam is more than capable to do that if his number's called.

Q. When Walter went up the ladder, he wanted somebody to hold it for him. You didn't have those concerns. You were shaking that thing. How did it feel for you personally to have that moment, bring the nets

down?

TODD GOLDEN: Just really proud. Proud of the group that I've been able to put together both from a staffing perspective and student-athlete perspective. That's really the thing that I think about the most in terms of being the leader of this program, is just making sure we have really talented, really good people in our program that. To put the Gators in front of anything else.

Having great attitude, great work ethic, most importantly people that really want to be Gators. You know especially following our program as closely as you do, we have a lot of guys that weren't exactly five stars or thought of as being great players prior to entering our program. I think our staff has done a really good job of identifying talent that fits the way we want to operate.

Year one was up and down. Year two we were able to add a lot of guys that met that standard. Most importantly between years two and three, we kept a lot of those guys that we thought were really important to build with and around, just the natural progression of different guys like Condo, Tommy, Zel, Will and Walt taking the next step, elevating their game, bringing in Rueb, Ali, Sam, Urby. Denzel, again, I mentioned him, he's done an incredible job. The thing I'm most proud of in our program, in a time where a lot of these programs and rosters are transactional, we try to do a good job of developing our young guys from the ground up.

Most importantly it's our guys, our players. It's very easy to have a mentality right now to always look and see what's out there, to see what situation might be better. We've had a number of guys that weren't starting players, that could easily have left and got a start be job somewhere else, but wanted to really compete at the highest level, be a part of something bigger than themselves.

Our team talent is exceptional, and that's why I think we have a chance to make a deep run.

Q. You faced a road-like atmosphere here today. How is that adversity you faced through the weekend going to be helpful?

TODD GOLDEN: There's really no better way to prepare your program for March than playing in the SEC tournament. We played a Missouri team on Friday night in the quarterfinals that has a very good chance to make a deep run in March. They're incredible. Beat us at home. They have played exceptionally well all year.

We found a way to get past them, then we have to play Alabama, who just beat Auburn on the road. In my humble

opinion, one of the best teams in America, as well.

Obviously we played fantastic yesterday. We got off to a great start and never looked back. In the beginning of the second half, found a way to get past them. Then you get to play a program like Tennessee in the championship game. Rick Barnes is one of the best coaches in our business, Hall of Fame head coach. There's no program that has better culture or that is tougher than Tennessee.

For our program to stand up to that and find a way to become victorious today. As I said earlier, I'm incredibly proud of the way our student-athletes have competed, the way they've carried themselves.

TODD GOLDEN: The way our staff has prepared our guys.

We're in much better shape going into the NCAA tournament this year than last year. Trying to get through Micah's injury, playing four games in four days. I thought we were a little fatigued. I think this year we'll be more ready to go as we step into the NCAA tournament this week.

Q. Was there a point last summer that maybe you knew or maybe you talked to your coaches and said, We don't have a chance to be really good, we have a chance to be championship great? Do you recall a moment like that? Did you feel that way every day?

TODD GOLDEN: When we constructed this roster, we felt like if all the pieces gelled and were unselfish, we'd have a really good chance.

I'm not sure until we really got through the summer, got to see our guys practice, how they wanted to operate together. Probably early on in the fall we were like, All right, if this group can stay the course, continue to put the team first, we have a chance.

Obviously we go undefeated non-conference play. There were question marks with our team. How is their schedule? Are they ready for this opportunity? We get into conference play. Obviously we lose to Kentucky. When we beat Tennessee at home, obviously played very well, that was kind of the moment. Obviously at the time Tennessee was ranked No. 1 in America. We just played very well. That kind of gave us an idea of what our ceiling could be this year.

But truthfully, for me, it's all about just making sure our floor stays incredibly high. If our floor's high, we're going to be able to beat teams we should beat deep. To go deep in March, you have to catch some breaks, whether that's

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

matchups, some shots going in. You have to put yourself in position to be successful, and this team has done that.

Q. Along with the continuity on your roster, these are all assistant coaches that came here to Gainesville with you. Can you speak to their investment, how critical they've been?

TODD GOLDEN: Yeah, no, our staff is incredible. When I was fortunate enough to get this opportunity, I had to think long and hard about the way I wanted to build my staff out. Obviously coming across the country, not spending a lot of time in the south, you ask yourself do you need geographical guys, guys that are comfortable in that region.

Kyle Smith gave me great advice. He said to get guys that you trust, you know are going to work hard with you, always going to have your back.

I really can't say enough about Carlin Hartman, his willingness to move his family from UNLV to join us in year one. Carlin and I worked at Columbia. I was director of basketball operations when he was associate head coach. Humility, leadership. He's an incredible mentor. Our guys look up and respect him at an incredibly high level.

Hub and I have worked together five out of six years I've been a head coach. He's just an incredible basketball mind, but an even better person. Again, just incredibly mature, responsible. Always being ahead of the game with what he does. He deserves a lot of credit for how explosive our offense is.

Korey McCray has done a great job just being a great resource for our players. He manages our guys very well, has great relationships with them. They trust him. Done a great job with our guards.

John Safir deserves a ton of credit for our growth and program. I lean on him a lot for roster decisions, roster management. He's incredibly bright. A young star in our profession.

John Andrzejek deserves a lot of credit for our defense. He keeps us honest and makes sure we practice defensively enough every day. Just his intensity has really raised our floor that way.

Obviously Taurean Green has done a great job with our player development, working with our guards. I really believe we have the best backcourt in America. Part of that is the growth in the work he does with them every day.

Our staff is fantastic. Without them I'm not sure we'd have

the success that we have right now.

THE MODERATOR: All right. Thank you.

TODD GOLDEN: Thank y'all. Go Gators.

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