

Southeastern Conference Men's Basketball TipOff Media Days

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Birmingham, Alabama, USA

Florida Gators

Coach Todd Golden

Men's Media Day Press Conference



Q. Just wanted to ask you about the importance of retention with transfers specifically, the guys who you kind of hand pick to fill a position of need on your roster and then being able to get them back where they can become leaders and understand your system more in depth. How important is that to your team's makeup?

TODD GOLDEN: Yeah, very important for sure for this year's team. For us going from years two to three, one of the advantages that we thought we had going into the off-season was that we had some good young guys in our program. A couple of them were transfers, a couple of them were guys that we signed as high school players.

And we really tried to pour into that continuity piece, and getting Walter back, getting Will Richard back, and then a couple of our young guys like Alex Condon, Tommy Haugh, Denzel Aberdeen. Those five specifically created a great nucleus for us, and then we were able to go out and hand pick some guys out of the transfer portal that we thought would complete our team.

But it all starts with the retention, and it all starts with that continuity, and any team that's able to build continuity within their program I think is going to be a better chance of being successful.

Q. Todd, you had a lot of coaching matchups with Mark Pope out west for a few years there. What was he like to coach against? What do you think he's going to bring to the SEC?

TODD GOLDEN: Mark was always great to compete against. I've always thought that Mark is a really, really good coach, from his style of communicating with his players to how they play and how they execute offensively. BYU got a lot better when he got there.

It was always a contested and heated battle when we matched up. Our last time competing against each other, we actually became victorious over them in the WCC tournament, and it gave us the opportunity to make an NCAA tournament.

But they're always heated, always highly contested. And I think he's going to do an incredible job at Kentucky. To be honest, to get back to his alma mater, obviously has a lot of pride being back there and has great confidence in understanding what makes Kentucky a really good spot. And I just think he's a great basketball coach. I think he's going to have a lot of great success there.

Q. You guys obviously have had some good guards at wherever you've been. How good can this group be? I know you brought in Alijah. I think you're better defensively. But as a whole between Walt and Alijah, Denzel, Richard, how good can that backcourt be?

TODD GOLDEN: My belief is that they're going to be really good. Really good. Maybe a little unconventional. But you mentioned the four main guys. Walt Clayton is First Team All-League Preseason. We expect him to have a great year for us.

Will Richard is a guy that coming into senior year should have a lot of success. He's going to shoot the ball well. He's gotten a lot better on the defensive end and rebounding.

Alijah Martin is a huge addition for us. I think he does a great job of raising the bar for us on a daily basis in terms of our competitiveness, in terms of our belief and in terms of our confidence.

And then Denzel Aberdeen is a young man that people that follow our program closely kind of saw him coming on at the end of last year. And I suspect him to have a fantastic year for us. He's been great in camp. He will probably come off the bench for us. But he will be a guy that plays a lot of minutes for us.

We have some other guys in Urban Klavzar and Kajus Kublickas that could help us as well.



But those four guys are the ones leading the charge, and I would expect them to have really good years.

Q. What does a player from across the ocean, what are some of the attributes they might bring to a college team?

TODD GOLDEN: Yeah, we've been big on international recruiting, both at San Francisco and now here at Florida. Our job is to put together the best roster of 13 guys, and I think in this day and age when everybody has really, really high expectations for what they're able to achieve and what their goals are, kind of balancing that out is really important for having team success.

I think a lot of the international players, they've been a part of team and been a part of program or club for a long time. So they kind of come up in that environment where they understand sacrifice and understand putting the team in front of themselves. They're coming over to the United States into college with a specific mission of becoming a better basketball player and getting the resources that we have at our institutions and making their lives better.

I just think a lot of these guys -- not everyone is the same, but a lot of these guys come in really balanced and with a team-first mentality that helps you build out a better team.

Q. I wanted to ask, going back to Mark Pope, you've always been very open about your embrace of analytics and how you construct your roster, how you play, and Mark Pope obviously has done that a lot with Cody Fueger as his top assistant. In a way do you see them being kindred spirits to you in the way you play the game?

TODD GOLDEN: Yeah, I think we think about it similarly would be my guess. I've never really sat down with Coach Pope and talked to him about it, but just by obviously setting their teams at BYU and seeing how they played and kind of the different things that they executed, they're a smart group for sure, and they're always very efficient. I think they do a good job understanding the talent within their program and using that to the best of their abilities.

This will be a new challenge for him, obviously, coming to a place that he's familiar with but with a roster that's brand new and getting those pieces on the same page. But I feel confident that he'll figure it out.

Cody is a great coach, as well. I've known Cody for a long time, really smart, probably deserves his own job at this point, to be honest, but he'll help Coach Pope continue to get that program back where it belongs. But I think they're

very analytical and will be interesting to see how they go about building their rosters in the SEC.

Q. You won 24 games last year, and I know you probably don't put a lot into rankings, but you're ranked 21st preseason in the poll yesterday. What does that say about the direction of your program?

TODD GOLDEN: Yeah, I think it says that we're on the right track. As you said, we're not spending a whole lot of time applauding ourselves on being ranked 21st. Like I said, we appreciate the respect that we're receiving from the AP, and it means a lot to us.

But unless we're better than that at the end of the year, we're going to think of it as being a disappointing year. We're using that as a starting point, but we're not satisfied with that being our final ranking. But now going into year three, we feel like being ranked there and then having the opportunity to maybe advance in the tournament if we do what we're capable of will be the right trajectory for what this program needs and what it deserves.

It's a nice honor, but we're not satisfied with that.

Q. We just talked to Bruce Pearl, and he talked about helping young coaches. I've watched you coach against him. There's a lot of mutual respect. What has he meant to you?

TODD GOLDEN: He didn't help me much in the SEC Championship game last year, so we can't give him too much credit for that. Listen, I have three mentors in this profession: Randy Bennett, who I played for at St. Mary's; Kyle Smith, who I played for and worked for quite a bit; and then obviously Bruce. Without those three guys, coaching me, leading me, mentoring me, I would have no chance to be where I am today.

Honestly, they're unique. Kyle and Randy coach and run their programs one way. Bruce is very different. I try to meet in the middle of that with my own personality involved. But everybody that knows me and knows our family knows how close Bruce, Steven and I are and how far back we go, and we're always going to be family. I'm grateful for those guys forever.

Q. Alex Condon had one another scholarship offer, St. Mary's --

TODD GOLDEN: And Utah.

Q. And now he's All-League. Talk about what you expect from him as a sophomore, and you guys probably weren't surprised, but what he brings.

TODD GOLDEN: Yeah, we were a little surprised I would say by how productive he was last year. We thought we got a really good player when we signed him and brought him into our program, but we weren't necessarily expecting an All-SEC freshman or a guy that played 20 minutes a game. I think he outkicked our expectations that way.

This year, listen, it's going to be a big challenge for him. We're building around him and Walter and Alijah and Will. The expectation for him is going to go up a lot. Obviously he's going to start for us this year, so he's going to be a little higher on the scouting report than he was last year, and that jump from a freshman to sophomore year generally guys improve a lot, but at the same time we're asking a lot more out of him.

For me, my expectation is simple. I expect him to play his tail off every night. That was one of the things that made him so unique last year was how competitive he was as a freshman. I'm not necessarily worried about how many points he scores or what his field goal percentage is. As long as he's playing winning basketball for us and competing his tail off every night like he does, he's going to be just fine.

He's a guy that I'm not -- I'm not going to put a timetable on it, but I'm pretty confident he's going to be playing at that next level at some point.

Q. Talking to people around basketball about your program, they've kind of described how well you guys develop and identify big men. I know you can't get too much into how you guys do that, but how much do you rely on the analytics when you're finding the right fit in your front court?

TODD GOLDEN: I would say kind of our data analysis is a large portion, but definitely not all of what we do in terms of our evaluation of players. A lot of times it's what points us in the direction of a specific player, but then we've got to learn a lot more about them as a person before we bring them into our program.

To do a better job answering your question, it's a big part. It usually helps us identify which guys we want to go after, whether it's in the portal or whether it's high school guys, but then we kind of drill down on some other aspects that are really important to our culture in terms of making sure they align with our staff and our players as we move forward.

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