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Florida Gators

Coach Todd Golden

Men's Media Day Press Conference



Auburn over the last decade, I think you have the right to have somebody within your program get the opportunity to lead. If you look in that program, Steven has been with Bruce every step of the way, from the lowest spot on the totem pole to now being an associate head.

The reality is Steven knows what it takes to be successful. He did it as a player. He's done it in different facets as a coach. He's an incredibly hard worker and great leader. I'm excited for him to have this opportunity.

THE MODERATOR: We welcome to the stage Todd Golden of the University of Florida.

We'll go ahead and take questions for Coach Golden.

Q. You didn't know it at the time, what was it like to send Bruce into retirement? Few people know Steven Pearl as well as you do. What makes him ready to take over that job?

TODD GOLDEN: Yeah, honestly, my truthful answer is bittersweet. Winning the semifinal game. We were incredibly proud, an incredible moment for our program. Walking across the court to shake hands with Bruce after the game was bittersweet.

He's always incredibly gracious when we compete. In that moment, the same as always. At that time I didn't know that he was going to move on. Understand that was the last game that he coached in college is something that's going to be a memory of mine for a long time.

But I love him. I'm happy for him that he's in a position where he's accomplished and can kind of ride out into the sunset and enjoy his life without the stresses we have to endure on a daily basis.

As for Steven, I'm incredibly confident he's going to be very successful as a head coach at Auburn. I think it's important, you look around, let's just use the Final Four last year as an example. Three of those four programs will hire within for their next coach. You look at Houston, Kelvin Sampson, Hall of Fame head coach as he retires. Kellen is going to become head coach of that Houston program.

Duke, Coach K retires. They hire an assistant from within the program that's never worked anywhere else.

When you achieve success at an incredibly high level like

Q. Denzel was pretty transparent about the breakup between you and him. What kind of led to him deciding to open up his future plans? What is Kentucky getting?

TODD GOLDEN: You said he was transparent, so I'd like to hear what he said to you.

Q. He said there was a meeting, the meeting he went in expecting to return to Florida, then by the time the meeting ended he said it probably wasn't going to be.

TODD GOLDEN: Because? You said he's transparent. You're asking.

Q. I guess just at that meeting was where the line was drawn in the sand, and that was kind of that.

TODD GOLDEN: We love Denzel. Incredibly grateful for the contributions that he made to our program. He's a huge part of our national championship team.

He was a guy that came with us right when we got the job. The reality is we would have loved to have Denzel back. There were other things that were more important to him than what we had to offer at this point.

That's the opportunity and the right that every student-athlete has, to be able to dictate and determine what's important to them. He had played well enough to put him in a position where he was desired by a lot of programs.

Every person, whether it be a coach or a player, have

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different things that are important to them when making decisions. Unfortunately it didn't align. We would have loved to have him back.

I think he's going to have a really good year for Mark. I think he's a great kid, comes from a really good family. I expect him to help them become really successful this year.

Q. Obviously you're replacing what analytically was the best back court in the history of the SEC. Probably unfair, it is unfair, to compare Boogie and Xaivian to those guys. What do you like about them standing on their own as they step in to complement this front court?

TODD GOLDEN: Yeah, I love 'em both already, to be honest. What you said is exactly right. We're not comparing them to Walter and Alijah. That's just not fair. I don't think it's healthy for us as a staff to do that. I don't think it's healthy for them as players to have to take on that expectation.

The reality is we return our four best front court players in Alex, Tommy, Rueben and Micah. My expectation is those guys will take a huge leap, become the leaders of this team, take on a lot more responsibility than they had last year. In theory it should make it easier on those guys coming in and learning our system and program.

Boogie, really hard worker, coachable. I think came in with a great mentality, is allowing us to guide him. A great competitor. Incredible on-ball defender. I'm excited for him to be picking up opposing team's point guards at the top of our defense. He's a great facilitator. He does a great job of getting in the paint, making plays for others. Really unselfish that way. We need that from him because we have a lot of other really good players.

I look at Xaivian is a guy coming in, just a really fantastic offensive player. Really quick and explosive with the ball in his hands. Another true point guard, but we'll be able to play off the ball a little bit. When Boogie is not in, he'll play point. A guy that can score at all three levels. Efficient that way.

As you know, we like to play with multiple ball handlers. He's a guy that -- whichever one of those guys is being guarded by the lesser defender on the opposing back court is going to be able to take advantage of that on every given night.

Q. Obviously Xaivian and Boogie are an important part of what you want to do. How will those guys share ball-handling responsibilities and work together?

TODD GOLDEN: Yeah, the great thing about basketball is that you need five guys on the court at all times. We play with multiple ball handlers. We always have. You can go back to our San Francisco days with Jamaree Bouyea and Khalil Shabazz. We're going to always try to play two guys that can make plays.

We'll play with a ball screen, be able to call and run different actions in the halfcourt to get Xaivian downhill using a ball screen. Boogie is going to start at the point for us, but Xaivian will be a second side play-maker and then will play point when Boogie is out of the game.

I think they're both going to have really good seasons. They've really kind of come into their own over the last couple weeks. I feel like they're getting comfortable with the way we play. Obviously we throw to our big guys a lot, let them be play-making hubs in the middle of the floor. They're getting more comfortable playing with guys like that.

They're both great guys, first and foremost. Pleased with their willingness to assimilate into our culture and style of play. They're both mature and smart. I've seen good and rapid growth from them early on.

Q. I think a lot of people think you've assembled maybe the best starting five in the country. Aside from those guys and Micah, who has maybe separated themselves?

TODD GOLDEN: I'm glad you mentioned Micah because I think he's -- honestly, I wanted to bring him also today. He lost the coin toss between the other three guys that made it. I appreciate Garth and the commissioner allowing us to bring three.

I know a lot of us coaches weren't satisfied only getting to bring two last year. Garth was very accommodating to us that way. I'm sure next year we'll be asking for four. Be ready for that. I'm joking (laughter).

Micah deserves to be here today. One of the most unselfish humans I've ever been around. For him to give us his year to come back. We don't win the national championship without him, that's the bottom line. I'm really glad that it worked out the way it did for him.

He's like a sixth starter for us. I throw him in that mix.

Looking at the rest of the roster, we have a great opportunity for a couple guys to step up and earn big minutes. Urbie Klavzar is a guy, rotational player for us. CJ Ingram and Alex Lloyd, two freshmen, have done a



great job. Usually hard for freshmen to play in our program. I think both those guys have a chance to earn roles. And Isaiah Brown and AJ are guys that can play roles, as well.

Q. I'm very curious, coming off the heels of the championship, what has this last five months been like for you?

TODD GOLDEN: It's been very busy, obviously. You don't get a lot of time in the moment to enjoy it because you finish up, then that whole week you're stressed about making sure you can bring the guys back that helped you get to that point. You're thinking about how am I going to replace one of the best back courts that ever played in college basketball.

You don't get to sit on your couch for a week and watch highlights and enjoy it. We wanted to make sure we put ourselves in position to compete at a high level again this year. We worked really hard to do that. As commissioner mentioned, we got to go to the White House. We got to go up to New York City and be honored at the Winged Foot dinner, which is amazing. You get all these special experiences.

At the end of the day, you turn around and then it's summer workouts, you have your team on campus for the first time, you're trying to make sure you turn the page on that success and get everybody ready for the next year.

It's been busy, it's been great. I wouldn't prefer it any other way. I'm just really happy that we're at the point now where we're getting close to playing scrimmages on Saturday. Before you know it, we're going to open up in Vegas.

Q. Obviously a lot of success in the SEC. Obviously getting stronger. A lot of teams are still looking for their first national championship. Without giving away too much, what do you think allowed y'all to get over that hump? What can you see other teams doing to win more national championships for the SEC?

TODD GOLDEN: We were really fortunate last year that we had incredibly unselfish group of student-athletes. I think that was as important as anything else. We had multiple guys that gave up individual stats and accolades for the greater group and greater good of our program.

That was the main thing. Like, we had guys that were willing to sacrifice because you can't make it to the top of the mountain if guys are worried about partnerships or how many touches they're going to get.

After that my staff did an incredible job from top to bottom. Carlin Hartman, our associate head coach with the bigs. Got those guys flying around, playing hard every night.

Korey McCray working with the guards. Kevin Hovde was our offensive coordinator. John Andrzejek was our defensive coordinator. We were really organized.

Similarly to our team, I thought our staff was really unselfish. If you guys ever spent any time around our program, you know there's a lot of love and joy between our staff and getting to work together every day. It doesn't really feel like work. Those are really the two main things.

There wasn't any secret sauce we had other than being really consistent and competing our ass off every day.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Coach Golden.

TODD GOLDEN: Thank you very much.

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