

# NCAA Men's Basketball Championship - Final Four: Florida vs Houston

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San Antonio, Texas, USA

Alamodome

**Florida Gators**

**Coach Todd Golden**

**Walter Clayton Jr.**

**Alijah Martin**

Finals Pregame Media Conference



Made some big-time winning plays down the stretch to take that game away from Duke.

I think your comparison is right now. I think Tennessee is a very good comparison in terms of their culture and their identity and toughness, the way they defend. We'll look at that film a little bit for us as a way to attack it a little bit.

Houston obviously is exceptional. It's going to be a big challenge for us tomorrow night.

**Q. In the NBA, the best player on the team plays some point guard because that helps the offense. For you as an analytics guy, how did you make the decision to move Walter to point guard?**

TODD GOLDEN: He did a really nice job for us off the ball last year playing with Zyon Pullin, being a secondary handler, play-maker. We saw some really great examples of his ability to make plays out of the ball screen. Watching him play pickup, pushing the ball in transition, he showed to us and proved to us that he could do that, become the primary ball handler, lead the team.

I think he's done an incredible job of getting himself in great shape. He works on his game a ton. Having someone that's such an elite threat to score with the ball in his hands at all times obviously makes everybody else so dangerous as well.

A lot of questions were asked last summer and this fall if we would have enough ball handling on this team, enough play making. Obviously Walter has quieted those concerns and has led us to the national championship game.

**Q. Looking at the numbers, is it fair to call this a contrast in styles? What do you feel about your team's ability to kind of adapt to the situation and play whatever kind of style it needs to?**

TODD GOLDEN: Yeah, it's funny, analytically, us and Houston, on KenPom, our efficiency margin is within point one of each other over a hundred possessions. We're an elite offensive team, a top 10 defensive team. They're a

THE MODERATOR: We are joined by Todd Golden. We'll ask you to make a statement.

TODD GOLDEN: Good morning. Great to be here with y'all. Really proud to be here. Proud of our group for the way we performed last night and found a way to beat a great Auburn team.

Thought we did a great job in the second half just raising the bar with our toughness, our physicality, defended really, really well. Won the battle of the boards which I thought was a big part of that victory. Obviously Walter and his teammates stepped up late making big-time shots, which allowed us to pull out this victory.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

**Q. Obviously Houston leading the nation in scoring defense. The challenge of dealing with their physicality. How much have you dived into the film?**

TODD GOLDEN: They're the best defensive team in America. They have just a great identity as a program of just being both physically and mentally tough. That's something we've tried to pride ourselves on this year.

Houston I would say is a great example of that. Not only this year but Coach Sampson and his program have done it for a long time now.

Talk about resilience and toughness, I feel like they showed that in a big-time way last night. I think they were down 14 at one point, down seven with a minute and a half to go. Never quit, never gave up. Didn't hang their heads.



top 10 offensive team and elite defensive team.

I think it's going to be a contrasting battle that way. Hopefully we can get the game up and down a little bit. They're going to impose their will as they've done on everybody this year. We're a pretty tough team also. We're going to have to do a better job than we did last night. I thought first half we let Auburn take it to us a little bit. We can't allow that to happen tomorrow night.

They're absolutely an elite team. The way they guard, they're going to make it really hard on us. I think they'll pressure the ball screen, try to get the ball out of Walt's hands. But they rotate, they're long, they play so hard, so tough. We're going to have great mental and physical toughness if we want to give ourselves a chance tomorrow night.

**Q. Yesterday there was a ten-and-a-half-minute period towards the end where Duke could only make one field goal. Was there any notes that you could figure out on that Houston defense down the stretch that you make sure your offense doesn't have a single period like that tomorrow?**

TODD GOLDEN: You said our defense against Johni? You said Cooper Flagg?

**Q. Yes.**

TODD GOLDEN: Got you.

Yeah, I mean, their defense worries me a lot, absolutely (smiling).

You look at a guy like Tugler, Roberts, they have incredible length and athleticism and physicality inside the paint. They wear you down, make it really hard on you.

Yeah, it definitely concerns me. I think we're going to have a couple different ideas, a couple different pitches, for lack of a better term, to throw at them late in the game.

I think there's going to be some issues for us out there. If we don't kind of troubleshoot well, we'll be in trouble.

We're a pretty elite offensive team. We'll lean into that and allow our guys to go out there to make some plays and see what happens.

**Q. Obviously Condon and Walter's backgrounds playing other sports have been well-documented. Alijah and Tommy were big football players. How much have you valued multi-sport guys and what do they bring to the table?**

TODD GOLDEN: It's definitely happened. I don't know if it's necessarily happened on purpose or if it's more just like the type of guy that we like. Seems the high IQ, just super athletic guys generally are guys that are multi-sport guys.

It's funny 'cause just from my experience, I feel like the multi-sport guys have really good feel, really good IQ. They've had to get used to playing different sports and being in different situations.

I think it's definitely helped our team a lot. These guys, their knowledge and their ability to just use some of those experiences and toughness.

We have a couple guys that played football, Tommy, Walt, Alijah. They're pretty tough also. They're not afraid to take hits. I do, I think that's kind of a hallmark of our team.

**Q. There's a lot of contrast between your teams, but also some similarities when it comes to resilience. UConn, Texas Tech, them last night. In terms of having to kind of be put away, be killed a couple of times in order for them not to come back, what does that say about your team and how Coach Sampson coaches?**

TODD GOLDEN: I think for me it's really just about the players, the guys we have in our program. Coach Sampson, I love the way he talks about his team, the way he talks about his staff. I saw something that he doesn't take phone calls when he needs spots on his staff, he just promotes from within. You can tell by the way they recruit, they're not worried about rankings, they're worried about finding tough-minded young men that are willing to put the Houston program above themselves.

That's what we've tried to do at Florida as well. After three years, as I said last night, I think we have a great group of those young men in our program that are resilient, that are tough, that are unselfish. Being compared to Houston's program in terms of resilience is a huge compliment for us.

It's what we continue to strive to build here in Gainesville.

**Q. Last night you started three of your five guys. Three of those guys started at other schools. At Florida, how do you get those guys to buy in, especially with Alijah's first season in Florida, so quickly to where they look like they've gelled so easily?**

TODD GOLDEN: It's part of the recruiting process. We talk a lot about it. We try to make sure we cross our T's and dot our I's before they even get to campus because we

don't want to have those issues or run into any problems that way.

To become a part of our program these last couple years, you had to buy into our vision, you had to buy into putting the program above yourself.

Actually four of our starters are transfers. Micah is another one that plays for us coming off the bench. They're all guys we brought in. This is how we want to do it. We think you guys can be a huge part of this, really perfect in terms of fitting in with what we want to do. You have to be unselfish and buy into it.

They all have from the moment they've gotten to campus. They've allowed us to coach them hard. Our team talent is elite. That's why we're still alive.

**Q. When you think of the toughness, the athleticism of your team, but when you think about playing in the state of Texas against a Houston team, you were hearing how crazy it was last night, how do you help your team stay mentally focused when it feels like it's going to be a home game for Houston?**

TODD GOLDEN: We can draw a little experience from the SEC tournament championship game. Obviously playing Tennessee in Nashville. I probably took for granted what that environment would be like. We walked in there, and it was 80% Tennessee fans. I was like, man, we got a road game to try to win the SEC title.

I anticipate it being somewhat like that tomorrow as well.

It's just part of what you have to get through to win a national championship. Houston is an amazing team. They deserve this opportunity. Obviously they're going to have some great momentum. They should have a lot of people here tomorrow night.

For us, it allows us to add another chip on our shoulder and prove, try to prove, that we belong and that we can win in another hostile environment. It will be a bigger challenge because of that. It's nothing that we haven't seen before this year. We've been able to fight through it.

I'm hopeful we will, as well, tomorrow night.

**Q. When teams put two on the ball against Clayton with the ball screen, which you're expecting them to do, what can you do to help him still get quality shots?**

TODD GOLDEN: The key is going to be the other guys stepping up and making enough plays to where they don't feel comfortable doubling him every time.

The great thing for us is our bigs are great decision-makers and play-makers in the middle of the floor. Last time with Tommy, we could just throw him the ball. Now he's playing four-on-three. He's a great decision-maker. We'll live with the results of that.

If our bigs are able to hit a couple pick-and-pop threes in the middle of the floor, I think that will be very important, that might take away a little of their aggressiveness in the ball screen coverage.

I think Walter is going to be able to run around it a little bit, keep their on their toes in terms of whether he's going to get off it quick and let somebody else make the play or get in the paint.

It's going to be a challenge. I think the other guys, as we've done all year, are going to have to step up and take advantage of having four-on-three after he uses a ball screen.

**Q. Talk about how contrast, sticking on that theme, you and Kelvin -- I think Kelvin was already coaching by the time you were born. Going against a coach like that with all that experience, what kind of challenge does that bring for tomorrow night?**

TODD GOLDEN: I mean, he's just an amazing coach. That's the biggest challenge. He's done it at an incredibly high level for a long, long time, at a lot of different places.

Coach Sampson and the Houston program is definitely one of if not the toughest programs in America. They've been doing it for a long time.

In my estimation, a little underrated, as hard as that might be to believe. They're just an elite, elite program. They're so consistent, they're so tough. 19-1 in the Big 12 this year. 18-game winning streaky think right now that they're on.

It's a huge challenge for us. But for us to continue to put ourselves on the map and continue to get Florida basketball where we want it to be, tomorrow night is a great opportunity. We got 40 minutes for one chance to win a national championship, continue to put ourselves in that conversation.

But obviously he has a longer résumé than I do. He's been at it a little longer than I have. It's going to be a huge challenge for me to compete against him tomorrow night.

**Q. Gator Nation is very excited right now. Almost 20 years since they played for a national title in football or**

**basketball. Have you had any memorable interaction with a longtime fan or booster that sort of stuck out, they expressed their gratitude?**

TODD GOLDEN: When we got back to the hotel last night, there were a lot of people there that were fired up, really happy about our advancing to the championship game.

It's been awesome. These last couple weeks, I go back a month, I feel like we've gotten some really good momentum. Winning the SEC title tournament championship, ever since then, really before that, but that was really when the support started coming in waves.

It's been awesome, man. Our players really appreciate it. Our staff appreciates it. I know our fans and our alums and our boosters enjoy being back in this environment, being back having an opportunity to compete to win a national championship.

We're just hopeful that we continue to bring them joy and have them be able to enjoy the experience.

**Q. What were some of those early practices like, some of the growing pains that Walter experienced when he made that switch to point guard? How has he evolved since then?**

TODD GOLDEN: He's done a pretty dang good job of it all year. I think the conditioning part was a huge key. I think for him going to get NBA workouts last spring and summer, whatever you want to call it, I think was really, really big for him, too, to be able to get some good feedback from six or seven NBA teams. It really motivated him.

He was a good, hard worker prior. I feel like after he got back from the combine, it was like he wasn't going to be denied. He just really raised the bar in terms of his work ethic.

We felt really good all summer, watching these guys play and practice, that he would be able to handle it. We had enough weapons around him with Alijah and Will in our front court being so good with the ball, Zel, shooters coming off the bench, that he would be in a position to be successful.

Obviously he hasn't been perfect all year, but he's been pretty dang good over these last couple months. Again, I'm just really happy for him.

**Q. Playing for a title tomorrow. Must feel like there's a steep learning curve you've hit over the last three weeks. Any significant lessons you've taken from these games?**

TODD GOLDEN: I mean, none of these games are the same. All of 'em provide different challenges and different decisions that we have to make, different preparations in regards to how we want to get our guys ready.

I think the UConn game was huge for us. That was the first time in a while that we had been really tested, had our backs against the wall. To be honest, I think we came into this NCAA tournament with some pressure after winning the SEC tournament championship. We were playing free and loose for a long time leading up to that. Then that first weekend, we played great for the first 50 minutes against Norfolk, then tightened up a little bit. The UConn game, we felt so much pressure to win, as you need to in the tournament. We weren't playing as free as we had before.

Winning that game gave us a little bit of freedom and we relaxed. I would say the Tech game was similar. I thought we played great against Maryland. Tech was kicking our butts for a while, got us down 10 in the second half. Showed grit and resilience.

Once we got here, we kind of felt like we had the weight of the world off our shoulders. We made the Final Four, now it's time to go out and hoop, see what happens. That's definitely how I feel now going into tomorrow night.

**Q. With Billy Donovan being inducted into the Hall of Fame yesterday, a big moment for Gator Nation, any extra motivation behind you reaching the national championship game for Florida? Did he share any advice with you before the matchup yesterday?**

TODD GOLDEN: I wouldn't say that it added any motivation. We were awfully motivated to make this championship game regardless (smiling).

I would say it's really neat to be able to do it with him in the building, with him being honored, for all of our fans and supporters that were here. Just an incredible full-circle moment. For him being celebrated at halftime, 20 years ago him leading this program to back-to-back national championships, it's special for them to see him being honored, see us be able to win last night.

I didn't speak to him before the game. It's funny. Taurean said they caught eyes at halftime. He said, You guys are going to be fine, stay the course, you'll get it done. I be appreciate him believing in the Gators last night.

**Q. As you dive into Houston, what can you gather from L.J. Cryer, just his ability from the three-point line, how you defend that or what makes that so tough?**

TODD GOLDEN: Yeah, I mean, they're obviously an amazing team. L.J. and the rest of their perimeter all shoot the ball so well, him, Sharp. Uzan is shooting the ball great, a guy that wasn't thought of as an elite shooter prior to getting to Houston. They've done an incredible job of getting him confident from behind the line.

They're a unique team. They don't necessarily finish great from two. Their two-point field goal percentage is lower than you would expect for an elite team, but they shoot the ball great from the three.

I'm not sure how analytical they think about the game, but they're an incredibly efficient analytical team. They don't turn the ball over. They get back all their misses.

They're very difficult to defend because of that. I think a big part of this game tomorrow is going to be the battle of the boards. Whatever team is able to gain an advantage there I think is going to give themselves a great chance.

We have to take care of the ball because they don't turn it over. They don't beat themselves. At times we hurt ourselves that way.

With L.J. and the rest of the perimeter, we have to do a good job of limiting their good three-point attempts.

Big-picture goal is going to be make them take tough twos, fight like hell to get the rebound. Every rebound we get is going to feel like we won the game, I feel like.

If we can do a good job of keeping them off the boards, we'll give ourselves a chance.

**Q. Both you and Houston turned up the defensive intensity in the second half of your games. I was wondering how do you think you stand up against them defensively? What are Rueben and Oliver's roles specifically against Houston coming up on Monday night?**

TODD GOLDEN: You said Rueben and Oliver? Who is Oliver?

**Q. The really tall guy.**

TODD GOLDEN: He's not playing this year.

But anyway, sorry, the question was about guarding their bigs, Rueben?

**Q. Yes.**

TODD GOLDEN: Obviously pretty usual. I thought our front court was super important for our victory yesterday. Johni had a great first half, but I thought we made him work really hard to have that first half. In the second half, I just thought our depth played out pretty well. Having Micah, Tommy, Rueben and Condo being able to run bodies at their front court was effective. They did a great job of guarding one on one the second half. We're going to have to do the same thing tomorrow night.

**Q. Have you had a chance for it to sink in yet that here you were not all that long ago, a walk-on at Saint Mary's, a short time later you're coaching for a national championship? Have you had a chance for that to sink in at all?**

TODD GOLDEN: Yeah, I mean, it's been an awesome journey, man. I've been super fortunate. Talk about it a lot. I played for a great coach, great coaches at Saint Mary's in Randy Bennett and Kyle Smith. I feel like those guys gave me my backbone as a basketball player and coach.

Coach Kyle Smith and I laugh about it all the time. If you're able to make it through the Saint Mary's program, you kind of get a badge of honor. You have to be pretty tough to make it there. I was there for five years with those guys, the first couple as a walk-on (smiling). Earned your stripes that way.

I do think that gave me a great base and foundation. Then obviously working with Bruce gave me some other great experience.

I've been fortunate to be around great coaches. I feel like I've learned a lot from those guys, tried to impart some of the wisdom that I learned from them to my players and staff. Along with those different things, just being myself. Probably happened a little faster than some people thought it might. But we're here now and we're 40 minutes away from being national champs. We have to beat an incredibly difficult team on Monday night, but we're in the arena. At this point it's all I can ask for.

**Q. Do you relish going up against guys with so many years of experience? A lot has been made of your youth. Shaping up to be the two youngest coaches going against each other, and now it's you and Kelvin Sampson. Do you relish those opportunities to go against super established, Hall of Fame-caliber guys?**

TODD GOLDEN: It's an honor to be able to do it. I'm just happy we're still playing. I don't really necessarily... I obviously respect everyone that we're playing against. We don't fear people. We respect them. That goes for the

coaches, as well.

All these guys that we're competing against at this point are either Hall of Fame coaches or potentially on their way to being Hall of Fame coaches or really, really successful head coaches.

The fact that we've been able to compete and stay alive through five games in the tournament, incredibly proud of that. This is a great opportunity again for us tomorrow night. Coach Sampson is a Hall of Fame head coach. If we're able to beat them, it will be a great honor.

Again, just having the opportunity is something that I don't take for granted.

**Q. In recent years the NCAA has kicked around the idea of a joint Final Four with the men's and women's in the same city. As someone that has experienced the men's side, what are your thoughts if something like that came to fruition?**

TODD GOLDEN: I think it could be awesome. I don't have a great answer or understanding of what the logistics of that would look like. I think it might be a little bit difficult to be able to do that.

The Women's Final Four has been incredibly exciting. I think it would be pretty neat to be able to bring the fan bases, both the men's and women's side, together and have an experience like that.

There is never too much great basketball that you can have going on at the same place at the same time, especially in the collegiate ranks.

**Q. Your team has had a bunch of explosive runs throughout the season, NCAA tournament. What role do your rim-running bigs have and your ability to do that?**

TODD GOLDEN: I'm glad you asked that because it's an incredibly valuable part of what we do. We talk about the backcourt a lot. Just how hard our front court plays. You talk about the rim running, a constant rim pressure that I think wears bigs down and wears other defenses down.

We occasionally will steal four to six points a game being able to throw ahead, let them finish the basketball.

Again, it's a 40-minute game. Our depth, our ability to run guys at our opponents, just that constant pressure that we put on the rim, that makes defenses account for those bodies, I think it's really, really important to the way we play offensively, for sure.

**Q. L.J., playing for a guy like Scott Drew his first few years at Baylor, how much do you think that helped, a championship-winning coach as well, just getting that experience, carrying that over to Houston?**

TODD GOLDEN: No, compare it to Alijah. Obviously Alijah didn't win, but making it to the Final Four, playing for a great coach in Dusty May. I have to imagine L.J. is similar for Coach Sampson. I was watching Scott Drew talk about L.J. on GameDay yesterday. He had great things to say about him in that he wished he was still in a Baylor jersey. That's a pretty big compliment to receive from a coach.

He's an incredible offensive player, and we have to do a good job on him early and often to give ourselves a chance tomorrow night. His experience I'm sure is helping them along their journey, as well.

**Q. You mentioned how this is going to be a battle of the boards, how important rim-running bigs are going to be. Is there anything you do in practice that gets your bigs in that mentality? Famous story Tom Izzo brought out football pads. What is it that you do in order to work with your bigs in order to make sure that they're ready for the physicality of a game like this?**

TODD GOLDEN: Football pads for tomorrow wouldn't be a bad idea, getting ready (smiling).

No, we're pretty consistent with that work in the way we watch film. There's a lot of accountability with our rebounding and the way we break down film and show not just our bigs but our perimeter as well. I think that's going to be really important, our guard rebounding tomorrow night.

Just the bar, the way our guys understand if they're not physical, if they don't rebound, they're a couple guys behind them or that are on the bench that are going to be willing to do it.

Just that kind of constant raising the bar for yourself and your teammate. But we talk about rebounding a lot. We focus on it a lot. That message will definitely be sent a lot leading up to this game tomorrow night.

**Q. How has your staff balanced still competing in the NCAA tournament, then adapting the college landscape? Also, what is the song that best describes you?**

TODD GOLDEN: I don't know if I have a great answer for you on the second one (smiling).



The first one, we're all in on this team. We're just all in on this team. We're obviously keeping track of the portal and what's going on, but we're not out there actively recruiting guys. We'll wait for Tuesday on that.

We have a lot of guys in our program that have the ability to come back. We're going to make sure we focus on getting those guys back in our program. If we miss on some guys because we're still playing in the championship game, then we'll miss on those guys.

My staff has done a great job of staying focused. I have two guys on my staff that have already accepted head coaching positions at other institutions. They're grinding to make sure we have every opportunity possible to win this game tomorrow. My staff has been amazing all year that way.

We got 24, 36 more hours to do it before those guys can move on and lead their programs. But yeah, they've done a great job balancing it. We'll attack our roster as soon as this run's over.

I'll have to get back to you on the song. I don't have a good answer for you on that right now.

**Q. You said a couple years ago you didn't want to draft guys, you wanted to sign free agents as in transfers over recruiting. Your effort was going to be, when you first took over the program, towards the transfer portal. I'm curious how that's played with your roster building and how guys like Denzel and Thomas and Alex have fit the "these are the freshmen I want."**

TODD GOLDEN: Yeah, at that point, I'm pretty sure that was when Matt was flying around with us when we were recruiting. We needed an influx of talent in our program and fast.

We focused that first year, after our first year, in the portal, making sure that we could kind of get, for lack of a better term, some guys that could help us in the moment moving forward.

With that being said, though, we have done a really nice job of finding the right young guys to recruit and to bring into our program.

We had three guys that were committed to Florida when I was fortunate enough to get the job. Two of them de-committed and left. Denzel stayed the course.

I remember driving down with Jonathan Safir to Orlando to meet him. We were thinking what are we going to have to

do to make him stay, be part of our program.

We walked down to his house, sat down with his parents. After a minute, he was like, I'm good, I want to be a Gator. I'm coming.

We were excited about his mentality and his willingness to buy into what we wanted to do.

With Tommy and Condo, as we had said, we were focused in on bringing in some older guys. Both those guys had great attitudes, great work ethic, wanted to be at Florida. We thought they had really good potential.

High IQ, came from great families, really fit the DNA of what we wanted our program to be.

Isaiah Brown is another guy that I would throw in that bucket. I think he's going to be a really, really good player for us.

Now we're at the point in our program where we want to recruit young guys that are high-character kids that want to be Gators, regardless whether they're playing a lot or not as a freshman, want to stick with us. Then retaining, retaining, retaining is going to be huge just like last year.

We're in this position because we retained Walter, Will, Condo, Tommy and Denzel. We were able to fit and bring in the right pieces. I think it's going to be similar for next year. We have a lot of guys we can bring back and build around, then pepper in what we need to.

I would say it's a healthy balance at this point. It's going to be a year-to-year decision whether it's more portal guys or young guys kind of seeing how the roster shakes out.

THE MODERATOR: Want to thank Coach Golden to joining us for 30 big minutes in the interview room.

TODD GOLDEN: Thank you. Go Gators.

THE MODERATOR: Alijah Martin and Walter Clayton Jr. join us. Good afternoon, fellas. We're looking for the first question for Walter or Alijah.

**Q. Walter, what were those conversations first like with Todd when he was talking to you about moving to point guard full-time? How comfortable were you with that move?**

WALTER CLAYTON JR.: He just told me he was going to put some trust in me to have the ball in my hands a little more, obviously with ZP leaving this past year. I played point guard in my life before. I've had the ball in my hands.



It was smooth. I was confident. These guys around me helped me be confident in that move also.

**Q. Alijah, have you had an opportunity to watch the replay of your dunk or see the still shots? What was going through your mind when you left the ground? Walter, what was your reaction to it?**

ALIJAH MARTIN: Yeah, I just seen the replays. I'm getting tagged all across the blogs and stuff like this.

What was going through my mind was get two points, honestly, when I seen he was kind of late. I had a chance to purge, so I did it obviously.

WALTER CLAYTON JR.: I've been waiting for him to dunk on somebody all year. I was in the back of everything like, Oooh. It looked a lot better in real life, man, in real-time. I don't think video do it no justice.

**Q. Much has been made of the assistant coaches that you have. Alijah, how much do you think Victor Lopez has helped keep you guys fresh throughout the NCAA tournament but improved you physically?**

ALIJAH MARTIN: Yeah, man, Vic is great at what he do. We enjoy the weight room. We have an unbelievable time in there. It's not torture or anything. It's fun in the way we do it. We get better at it, whatever we do, so...

**Q. How do you feel Coach Golden's analytical approach has made you a better player?**

WALTER CLAYTON JR.: Yeah, it just kind of gives like a different viewpoint of the game, of what's a good shot, what's a bad shot, what percentage of the shots are we getting back. It kind of gave me a different viewpoint coming here.

Definitely enjoy learning that side of the game.

ALIJAH MARTIN: Yeah, like Walter said, honestly it's a different perspective of basketball, honestly. It's just a credit to him and how smart he is, how good he do his job.

**Q. Alijah, when coach was out here, he was comparing L.J. Cryer to you, playing for a great coach, transferring over. Talk about him as a freshman winning a national title, then coming to Houston, what difficulties is that going to provide?**

ALIJAH MARTIN: Honestly, I don't know. I look at the game as basketball. I look at everybody else as regular humans. No discredit to him, but...

I'm just excited for my day, honestly. We'll see what that brings.

**Q. Walter, what do you recall about Kevin Hovde's visit to see you, you going to a restaurant, him showing you the videos of Jalen Brunson and stuff that he talked about?**

WALTER CLAYTON JR.: Yeah, I had Coach Hov out there with me. The condition is called Plyo. He saw a little bit of that.

Yeah, we went out and got some food after he was showing me a lot of film on what the Knicks run for Brunson, kind of the things he wanted to do on offense. Definitely enjoyed it when he came down and visited.

**Q. Resilience has been the definition of you guys' team. Why is your team so resilient, kind of the unwillingness to lose?**

WALTER CLAYTON JR.: Yeah, I've been saying it for a while now. Just the togetherness of our team, the love we all got for each other, allows us not to break apart during adversity.

Yeah, man, we just stay together in those moments. I can't speak for Houston team, what they got going on in the locker room. They seem like a very together team also. It should be a good 40-minute fight.

ALIJAH MARTIN: I agree (smiling).

**Q. What was it that Todd and his trip to New York to recruit you swung you from staying with Coach Pitino to going to Florida as Coach Pitino went to St. John's? What won you over in this trip?**

WALTER CLAYTON JR.: Just their willingness. I think that kind of show how bad they wanted me. That was one of the things.

It was very smart of them also, me and my high school coach talked about it afterward, how they got to see me as soon as basically just after I left St. John's. Only a couple hours, got up there, got to dinner.

Yeah, man, I was able to spend like three hours reflecting on Florida visit, St. John's visit, thinking about some things, some family stuff also. They came up and I ended up committing that night.

**Q. When you win these big games and you see the fans embracing you, how much it means to them, what**



**goes through your mind? Been a long time since the Gators have played for a national title in basketball or football.**

WALTER CLAYTON JR.: I'm just thankful, man. Obviously Florida basketball has a great history. I grew up watching it. Obviously we got T. Green on the staff to tell us about the experiences.

Just a great feeling to go out there and win games, having Gator Nation supporting us.

THE MODERATOR: Alijah, do you agree?

ALIJAH MARTIN: Yeah, I do (laughter).

THE MODERATOR: You can elaborate.

ALIJAH MARTIN: That's what it's about, just embracing the fans, them embracing us. That's what we put the work in for. When we put that jersey on, it just means more.

THE MODERATOR: Want to thank Walter and Alijah for joining us.

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