

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

Monday, April 7, 2025

San Antonio, Texas, USA

Alamodome

**Florida Gators**

**Coach Todd Golden**

**Walter Clayton Jr.**

**Alijah Martin**

**Alex Condon**

**Will Richard**

Finals Postgame Media Conference

Florida 65, Houston 63

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by the 2025 national champions, Florida Gators.

Coach, we'll ask you to begin with a statement.

TODD GOLDEN: It's a heck of an accomplishment. I'm super proud of everybody in my program, top to bottom. My staff, been together for three years, worked incredibly hard to help get our players to this point. Our players, they've been the difference all the way along. Been incredibly consistent all year. Have worked with a great work ethic.

Obviously we have an incredibly talented group, one of the most talented groups individually in America. I do think what separates us and has separated us all season long is our team talent, how our guys have played together and for each other all year. Because of that, we can call each other national champions for the rest of our lives.

THE MODERATOR: We'll take questions for Walter, Alijah, Alex and Will.

**Q. Will, did you feel that you needed to pick the team up the way the other guys were shooting the first half? Walter, could you comment on Will's performance while you were having a hard time getting open with their defense.**



WILL RICHARD: Yeah, just trying to make plays to help us stay in the game, help us give our ourselves the best chance to win. They were guarding Walter and other guys pretty hard. Will had seven assists. Even when they were guarding him so hard, I feel like he still made plays to help the team win. Just a good job by the team staying aggressive throughout that.

WALTER CLAYTON JR.: Yeah, for sure, Houston was guarding us great. They do a great defense out there. Everyone knows them for that. We have multiple guys on this team that can go. Tonight was one of those nights with Will. He showed it multiple times this year. Never know whose night it's going to be, and we showed that as a team.

**Q. What does it say about your ability to come back in four games out of the six, stay the course? Tonight you looked in tough shape for a while.**

WILL RICHARD: I feel like it just goes back to how connected we are as a team. I feel like we all don't have any quit. I feel like as long as there's time on the clock, if we take it possession by possession. I just like our resiliency and how we fight through adversity throughout the game.

ALEX CONDON: I think just a great down the stretch, how hard we played defensively. I think we got nine stops towards the end of the game. Yeah, it was just a team effort to get this win. It was crazy.

ALIJAH MARTIN: It goes back to what we did all season. Every stretch down the moment that we been through this year, just prepared for us this moment. We showed up, man. We never blinked. We're national champs.

WALTER CLAYTON JR.: I agree with what they said (smiling).

**Q. Walter, what did you see on the closeout with Sharp at the end? What does it mean to win the national championship on a defensive play like that?**



WALTER CLAYTON JR.: Yeah, I seen a lot going on. Felt like we were going to get something from Cryer or Roberts. Sharp kind of creped down to the baseline. I seen a back screen. I'm yelling back screen at Do. Sharp ended up slipping it, set elevator screens. We work on it in practice, closing out, jumping to the side so you don't foul the shooter. He pump faked, threw the ball down, ended up being a good play, Do got on it. We won the game.

The feeling, just surreal. It's a crazy feeling. I can't even explain it, but it feel good, though.

**Q. Walter, when you go 25 minutes without scoring, how did you stay motivated?**

WALTER CLAYTON JR.: These guys around me. My motto, we all can go. I understand that if it ain't my night, somebody going to pick me up. We understand we all just picking each other up throughout the year, man. We been doing that all the year.

Tonight was nothing different. The way we won tonight, it's just an exclamation mark on the year. It's great to win like that, knowing the fact that we're a brotherhood together, and we've been picking each other up all year.

**Q. Walter, on the final play involving Sharp, what was going through your mind when you saw that unfolding?**

WALTER CLAYTON JR.: Yeah, just go 100%. Honestly, my mind was just a little blank. Trying to get a stop. We ended up getting it, getting the win. Happy we got that done.

**Q. Up until probably late in the season, you hadn't had that many chances to have these kind of big comeback games. You've had four of them in the six you played in the NCAA tournament. Is there a compounding effect of confidence when you get one of those comebacks when you are in the next situation?**

WILL RICHARD: I mean, for sure. Definitely pulling out one of those games definitely gives you confidence. Knowing that you can win those type of games going forward.

I feel like, like I said, it's just a testament to who we are as a team. I feel like we're going to fight till the end and do whatever it takes to give ourselves a chance to win.

ALEX CONDON: I just think we have elite confidence in those situations. We seem to be in those tight situations a lot in this tournament.

Yeah, I think we got together in the huddle at one point when we were down, said we're good. No one is really stressing out too bad. We just have a lot of confidence in each other, knowing that our shot was going to fall down the stretch.

ALIJAH MARTIN: I agree with what they both said.

WALTER CLAYTON JR.: I agree with what they said also (smiling).

**Q. Alex, what is going through your mind on the last play when you see the ball rolling around? When did it set in that was the game right there?**

ALEX CONDON: Yeah, I think it was a great defensive play by Walter. I was questioning whether I should go out and leave my man. He did a good job of making him. It was going to be a travel if he picked it up. Just diving on it, hearing the buzzer go was a crazy feeling. Didn't feel real, for sure.

THE MODERATOR: We congratulate and thank Walter, Alijah, Alex and Will.

First question for Coach Golden.

**Q. I think you're the only national champion in the last 20 years to come back from a nine-point, or more, deficit. How did you watch your team navigates those moments? Each of those comebacks, each stressful stretches...**

TODD GOLDEN: Our guys have been really good all year staying the course. In this tournament, especially after the first round, every team you play is going to be really, really, really good. You have to have the mental toughness to be able to withstand a little adversity.

We played an incredible UConn team that was used to winning in the second round. Had to get through that one. Obviously Texas Tech, great program. Had to find a way to come back and beat them. Obviously Auburn. The best team in America most of the year in the semifinal.

There's going to be times of adversity trying to fight back in those games. Those are all great teams. Obviously Houston is a class act, amazing program, Hall of Fame head coach, super, super tough student-athletes.

Our guys knew that it wasn't going to be easy. Didn't panic when it got tough. As Will talked about, they did a great job of never getting too high, never getting too low. When we went down 12 in the second half, we stayed the course.

We didn't point fingers, didn't start to try to make hero plays, gambling defensively. We got rewarded because of that toughness that we displayed.

**Q. Talk about the toughness that you showed throughout the game, being physical with a physical Houston team, the ability to get those stops down the stretch.**

TODD GOLDEN: We've gotten a lot of credit for our offense because we've been so explosive all year, been one of if not the top two offenses in America all year. We've been a top 10 defense all year also. We've been able to stand up against really good offensive teams and find a way to get stops.

I thought Houston got the better of us in the first half. It was really just a disparity in the turnover count. We had nine, I think they had two in the first half. As I look here, we had four in the second, they had seven. Our defense won us the game tonight. We got nine straight stops in the middle of the second half.

We held them scoreless the last 2:20. Walter, great closeout, and Condo, great hustle play to win the game. That's what made this team special all year, that we can win different ways, and we showed that again tonight.

**Q. Youngest coach since this went to 64 teams to ever win a national title. What does that mean to you? Billy Donovan was the youngest before you.**

TODD GOLDEN: I mean, I'm super proud obviously. But I'm just a piece of this puzzle. I've been able to put together an incredible staff and recruit great student-athletes over these last three years.

We've stayed the course all year and worked really hard. My best answer is I'm just really proud. I'm proud to be the head coach of Florida. I'm proud of the way our players performed. I'm proud of the way our staff prepared our guys to become national champions.

**Q. As you're thinking in your head toward the end of the game how the end of this game is going to look, there's no way you could have imagined four Houston turnovers in a minute and 20 seconds.**

TODD GOLDEN: No.

**Q. Is that something you were trying to scheme up? Is that something that surprised you in their execution? What did you think when that ball was just loose?**

TODD GOLDEN: Down the stretch, we just made some big-time winning plays defensively. It's all kind of cloudy and a blur, but the one that sticks out is when I believe it was Sharp drove right off the right lane line, and Will was guarding somebody in the corner, ripped and stripped right off his leg with a minute 10 or a minute to go. That was a huge play for us.

Then the last play was just absolutely an amazing play. Walter recovered, closed out, as he said, flew by his right side to not allow himself to foul. Sharp made a heady -- he understood he couldn't touch the ball or else it would have been a turnover. Then Condo did what he does a lot, which is get physical, dive on the floor, make a winning play, getting on that loose ball.

I think there was 18 seconds or so on that last possession. We guarded 'em hard. I saw the ball loose. I was just hoping that we beat them to the ball. When Condo got on the floor, I figured it was either going to be a jump ball or we were going to come away with it. Next thing I knew, game was over.

Just an incredible moment and something I won't forget.

**Q. Tough start for Alijah and Walter in the beginning of the game. Down the stretch they came up big. What were some of the messages, the teammates and the coaching staff, so they could stay confident, maybe in the locker room as well?**

TODD GOLDEN: Yeah, our team's resolve, DNA, we don't have to give those guys confidence. You know what I mean? Walter Clayton, confident. Alijah Martin, confident. Houston is a great team. We knew it wasn't going to be easy. The message at halftime was we have to take better care of the basketball, but we have to continue to stay aggressive and attack.

For the first five or six minutes, the first eight minutes of the second half, they still made life really hard on Walter. When he came out, I thought Zel stepped up, gave us great minutes, gave Walter some rest so we could finish.

We didn't have to pump those guys up. Let's get back to being ourselves and do what we do. At this point in the season, they don't need those words of encouragement. It's kind of embedded in our DNA. They did what they always do. They stepped up. Alijah hit those big free throws. I thought he guarded really well all night. I thought Walter's defense in the second half was great. They just found a way to win the ballgame.

**Q. Yesterday we talked about how this game was going to be a clash of styles. This game was pretty**



**much played at Houston's style, their pace. How concerned were you about that? What did you do to overcome it?**

TODD GOLDEN: I was definitely concerned. They were dictating the tempo. We want to get out in transition. We were not able to, especially in the first half. I don't think we have any fast-break points. When we're at our best, we're getting stops, clean rebounds, getting out and running in transition, finding baskets. That was concerning.

But at halftime just looking at the numbers, the only thing that really stood out that was a big issue was our turnovers. I thought we had such uncharacteristic turnovers. I thought some of those, majority of those nine turnovers were not forced. They were just either poor decisions or being sped up offensively. We just needed to kind of calm down.

Obviously Houston is the best defensive team in America by the numbers. We knew it wasn't going to be easy to score on them. We weren't able to get up and down much in the second half. We were able to knock down our free throws and we just took much better care of the basketball.

**Q. Being down to Houston 12 some might say would be being down 15 to 16 to other teams. Are you at some point saying something good has to happen? We have to string stops together? What is the mentality at that time?**

TODD GOLDEN: The biggest thing from my perspective is I just didn't feel like we had much control of the game. I thought Houston was controlling tempo, I thought they were controlling with their physicality. There was an interesting technical call on our bench that I thought was an issue we had to battle through.

It was our defense. It was stops. It was finding a way to be able to get some run-outs. As we talked about, we didn't get a lot of transition, but we were able to break and get a couple.

Walt saw the ball go through the net with some free throws and the and-one layup. I thought that loosened him up a little bit. After that we were starting to get some good stuff, hit some shots, get downhill and get to the foul line. We were able to flip the game and the momentum a little bit.

Obviously incredibly challenging to do against an opponent like Houston. But we're pretty dang good also and we found a way to do it.

THE MODERATOR: We thank Coach Golden, head coach of the 2025 national champion Florida Gators.

TODD GOLDEN: Sounds pretty good. Thank you all.

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