

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: First Round - Boise State Colorado vs Florida

Thursday, March 21, 2024

Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Gainbridge Fieldhouse

Florida Gators

Todd Golden

Zyon Pullin

Tyrese Samuel

Walter Clayton Jr.

Will Richard

Media Conference



ZYON PULLIN: It's great seeing the hard work pay off. It's always something you dream of as a kid growing up watching the games. Just to be a part of something like this is special, and to do it with these guys is even better. So I'm really looking forward to the experience.

TYRESE SAMUEL: Yeah, we all came here with this goal of making March Madness and now we're here. So when you accomplish your goal, it feels good. And now we're focusing on making a run in this tournament, clicking, and making sure we make it to the Final Four and put Florida back on the map.

Q. Walter, obviously a Florida boy coming back to the Sunshine State and helping the Gators get to this point, what has this meant for you personally and what do you want to accomplish this week?

WALTER CLAYTON JR: It would mean a lot obviously coming back to Florida. My family was able to come to a lot more games this year rather than being in New York. Being able to play in front of them and playing with these guys and obviously getting here is a great feeling, but I definitely want to win some games. That's going to mean a lot.

Q. Will, this is another experience for you in the tournament. How much better do you feel about your chances this year with these guys?

WILL RICHARD: Yeah, it definitely feels very good this year compared to last year. It's a whole different energy, whole different feeling. It's great to be part of a group like this, and hopefully we can make something special happen.

Q. Walter, in terms of offense, how much freedom have you had with this, and how much freedom has Coach given all of you but specifically you?

WALTER CLAYTON JR: As far as freedom, I think a lot of us have freedom, the freedom to do things that's tailored to our game. I think our offense has a lot of movement in it. We just get moving, get the bigs involved a lot, and just obviously I think ZP being PG does a great job getting us

Q. Tyrese, talk about your excitement to be playing in the NCAA Tournament, and what would getting that first win mean for you?

TYRESE SAMUEL: I'm really excited. I think our whole team is excited. Getting this first win is going to mean a lot. We also last game was a loss for us, so coming off with a win and advancing in the tournament is going to mean everything to us.

Q. How much did you guys watch the game last night, and what do you make of Colorado?

WILL RICHARD: Yeah, we watched the first half together as a team and we went back to our room the watched the whole game. They're a good team, talented, so we're going to be ready for them.

ZYON PULLIN: Just a super talented team that plays hard, and I think we're looking forward to the matchup.

WALTER CLAYTON JR: I think they covered it all.

Q. You guys obviously came here with a goal to get to March Madness. In your last year, what does it mean to be on this stage and kind of have this run with these guys?



shots, and that allows the whole team to just play free.

Q. I covered the Kentucky game where you all won in overtime. How much of that was kind of a game changer, a season changer for you guys?

WALTER CLAYTON JR: Definitely was. I guess you could say a season changer. Going on the road and just getting a big win obviously created a lot of momentum, so ever since then we've had a lot of momentum and it's kind of pushed our season in the right direction.

TYRESE SAMUEL: Kind of like what Walt just said, it just puts us in the right direction. They obviously beat us the first time by a big shot at the end game, but winning that game also just changed our season around. We knew that we could play with anyone, especially being down in the game and coming back and winning in overtime, and from there I think that built a lot of confidence for our team.

Q. That game you went on a run, scored 100 points, then you added on a couple more. Did you think you were capable of breaking a century mark in a game like that?

TYRESE SAMUEL: I don't think so. I think just like we were just playing with the feeling of the game going out there. We have a lot of older guys on our team like me, ZP even Walt played for a great coach before and I feel like our poise and our confidence is helping us throughout the season. That's really pretty much it.

WALTER CLAYTON JR: I think as a team we thought we were capable of going out there and doing anything, but got to go out there and do it, and we did that, so...

Q. What do you guys feel like is going to be key for you to make a run, especially coming off the SEC tournament and what you guys did in Nashville?

WILL RICHARD: For us, I think it was just playing together, being the most physical team out there, doing things like rebounding and stuff like that. Just coming out and being aggressive the whole game and having a complete 40-minute game.

ZYON PULLIN: Yeah, I'd say the same thing. Just physicality, rebounding, and then just taking care of the ball, trying to get a shot up every single time, and I think that will give us the best chance to win.

Q. Obviously this is your first non-league game in quite a while. Are your preparations for this game any different than all your league games since it's going to be a non-conference opponent? You haven't seen

them play.

WALTER CLAYTON JR: No, our preparation is not going to be different. Obviously the coaches are going to give us a great game plan, we're going to watch film, do all of those things. Not going to change anything in preparation, just got to get ready to play.

WILL RICHARD: Yeah, like Walter said, I don't think we're going to change anything with the way we approach the game. We're going to watch film and stuff like that, practice, go over the plays and stuff like that and be prepared for Friday.

TODD GOLDEN: Obviously excited to be here. Got in yesterday. Feel like the guys are ready to go. Had a good little run at the SEC tournament last week. Dealing with some adversity obviously without Micah, but he's back with us, which was a big lift for our guys yesterday, to be able to see him and see his positive spirit. I felt like that gave us a little juice, and had a good practice yesterday before we left. Excited to get on the floor here today and get ready to compete against Colorado tomorrow.

We're just excited to be here.

Q. What was the scout like on Colorado and early thoughts on them?

TODD GOLDEN: Yeah, really good team. They're a team that had been dealing with a lot of injuries over the course of the whole year, and so felt like that held them back a little bit.

Now getting into tournament play, they don't play a ton of guys, but they're really talented. Obviously I think Coach Boyle is one of the better coaches in America. Just always been very, very successful, and they're really tough. They're big. KJ Simpson, their point guard, is one of the best point guards in America, and next to him they're 6'6" and bigger across the board. So we're going to have to deal with some size that we haven't seen on a regular basis.

They do a good job defending without fouling. They're one of the more efficient teams in America offensively.

I think a big key for us tomorrow is making sure we control the tempo and pace of the game. Even though they are very efficient in transition, they can operate pretty well in the half court. We want to get this game up and down a little bit and see if they can run with us. When we're at our best we're playing that way.

Contrasting styles a little bit, but we're excited for the



matchup for sure.

Q. How much can their size be a problem with Micah out?

TODD GOLDEN: Obviously it's a variable that we have to deal with, but the great thing is our depth in the front court has been a big positive for us all year, and we'll start Alex Condon tomorrow next to Tyrese, and Tommy will get minutes, and we'll probably show small-ball lineups tomorrow, as well, just to make sure we have enough depth to survive out there all game.

Next-man-up mentality, and I think Alex will be ready to go for sure.

Q. You mentioned small-ball lineups. With Richard's ability to potentially play the 4, how will that help you and how willing is he to embrace that role?

TODD GOLDEN: He's super willing to do whatever we need to win. He'll be ready to do that. I think both him and Riley provide some good athleticism on the wings that can provide tricky matchups for them. So getting those guys out there -- Denzel has obviously been playing a lot better lately so his minutes will be pretty solid again, as well, and obviously ZP and Walt have been good for us all year.

We'll stay pretty standard early on in the game but I think we'll have moments throughout the course of the 40 minutes where we try to spread them out a little bit and see if they can guard our penetration with those guys out there.

Q. You mentioned Alex being ready to go and you could have went with either Alex or Tommy. Both would have been freshmen. In Alex's situation, the intangibles of a freshman making a first career start on a big stage, what's the confidence level there in regards to how he's played this season?

TODD GOLDEN: Yeah, all four of those front-court guys give us different things, right, and their ability to have success. But in the big scheme of things, for lack of a better term, they're almost interchangeable. We've played both of them an average of 20 minutes all year. Different games, different guys have stepped up and given us huge lifts. We're very confident in all of them.

So whether it was Condo or Tommy, we felt like we could do the job. But trying to stay consistent and keep our size out there early on, we wanted to get Condo next to Tyrese, especially for that matchup and their size. But Tommy could have handled it and all three of those guys will play a lot of minutes tomorrow for sure.

Q. Todd, you said this week that you thought March Madness was the best event in all of college sports. Can you expand a little bit on that, and what was your experience like the first time around?

TODD GOLDEN: Yeah, I mean, it's just a 68-team single-elimination tournament, man, where you win six -- I guess you could win seven if you were in the play-in games, but you win six in a row and you get crowned national champion. It's awesome all the different matchups and the all the different teams that you see. It's trying to do everything you can to be peaking and playing your best at the right time of year.

But this event can go super quick for you, or if you play well you can stick around for a couple weeks. I do think last week was a good experience for our guys leading up to this, especially with how many new guys we have in our program this year, to go in a tournament setting and win three games in three days and obviously competing against Auburn in the championship. This team understands we're capable to beat Bama, beat A&M, beat Georgia on back-to-back-to-back days. It was the type of preparation you need to come into an event like this.

Obviously Colorado is going to be a really tough opponent. They should have some confidence after their win last night. But we'll be ready for them, and again, I think this team has the capacity to make a run, if things go our way tomorrow.

Q. How do you think your time at San Francisco and coaching in the NCAA Tournament will help you prepare for another run in the tournament coaching at Florida?

TODD GOLDEN: Yeah, just experience. Honestly, it's been kind of an identical experience. We played here, our team is in the same exact locker room that we were in two years ago. Hotel right down the road. But it's just second time, and just being more comfortable. I think our program and our staff has a really good understanding of what we need to do to prepare our guys for tomorrow in such a quick turnaround. Only have 40 minutes on the floor today, 20 tomorrow. But our schedule and plan of attack is built out really cleanly, and we just feel more prepared.

Last time we kind of were flying by the seat of our pants trying to figure it all out. This time I feel like we're much more prepared for the moment.

Q. This team, how have they matured and grown and kind of prepared themselves to be on this stage where they probably couldn't have handled it a few months ago?

TODD GOLDEN: I mean, we've just gotten better. I think that's kind of something that has gotten lost over these last couple years in college basketball. We felt like we had a really good group early on, but we had missed some guys whether it was due to ZP playing in Portsmouth or Micah turning his ankle in the beginning of the year, and we hadn't gotten our full group together, so they've been a little inconsistent.

But they've done a good job working hard and practicing hard every day and continuing to get better and better and even when we started out 1-3 in conference play just our maturity to continue to work and push through and not point fingers or try to go our own way has led us to this moment now where we've obviously played some really, really good basketball over the last month and a half, two months where I could argue we're playing about as well as anybody at times.

Just their willingness to be coached, their ability to stick with it and be consistent in our work I would say is kind of the main thing, and our older guys, specifically ZP and Tyrese, have done a really good stepping up and being consistent in their leadership, and we've had our other guys like Walt, Will and others really step up and play some really good ball.

But this team, their confidence has continued to grow as the year has gone on. I'd say that's a big reason why we've been so successful lately.

Q. This has been a pretty good city for Florida over the years. They won a National Championship here in 2006, and just curious your thoughts about this setting, being in Indiana, kind of a basketball crazy setting, being here, what kind of fan support you hope you're going to get being in Indiana?

TODD GOLDEN: I mean, it's an awesome place to play games. It's a really cool town, good downtown, obviously good restaurants. We had a great meal last night. It is obviously a very basketball-driven area.

My hope is we have a great crowd tomorrow. I think the guys -- being honest, I don't think the guys would really care whether they're here or Spokane, Washington. They'd be really excited to play in this NCAA Tournament. But it's cool and unique that we do get to play our first -- maybe first two games here in Indianapolis.

Q. Just curious, obviously with Colorado having a dynamic freshman like Cody Williams, he's kind of been not in the starting lineup recently. How difficult is he to prepare for, knowing how talented he is but

not knowing necessarily what his role is going to be on a night-to-night basis for them?

TODD GOLDEN: Yeah, he's obviously like you said a very talented young man. I think he's projected to be a lottery pick here in a couple months. Been dealing with a lot of injuries and now he's coming off the bench and he hasn't played his best the last couple weeks, but he definitely has the capacity to play really well and we definitely have a lot of respect for him as well as his teammates.

We'll prepare as if he's playing really, really well and make sure we're ready for him when he comes into the ballgame. But it just gives Tad and his staff another element, another piece to one out there, and when you have a guy that's supposed to be a lottery pick that's not playing like a top 5 or 6 guy on your roster, obviously you're a really talented team.

We'll be prepared for him and we definitely have a lot of respect for him and what he's capable of doing out there on the floor tomorrow.

Q. On Tristan da Silva, 20 points, 7-of-11 from the field, can score at all three levels as a power forward. What are the challenges you see on the quick film preparation you've done on him?

TODD GOLDEN: He's really good. The funny story about him is he was a COVID recruit, and when we were at San Francisco we recruited him quite a bit. His brother was a really good player at Stanford. So we've known about Tristan for a long time. He's achieved about what we thought he would in terms of becoming a really, really good player in the Pac-12.

He's one of those guys that he doesn't need a lot of plays ran for him, but he's also really, really effective and picks his spots really well, shot the ball really well, really efficient scorer, and we're going to have to throw some different looks at him to keep him off balance and keep him uncomfortable. But he's playing some really good ball, and he was a huge reason as to why they won last night.

Q. You've spoken a lot about how good the SEC is. After the run you guys had in Nashville, is there any additional motivation at just receiving a 7 seed given the run you guys have had, compiling 24 wins, or is that not something you care about at all?

TODD GOLDEN: I think we were -- "disappointed" would be too strong of a word. I would say a little surprised. But at the same time, it is what it is. We thought our run in Nashville would probably bump us up to a 6. But hey, listen, like I said, you're going to have tough matchups,

whether it was a 10 or 11 seed, it's still going to be really hard to win and advance.

Are we a little -- trying to use it as a chip on our shoulder? Yeah, probably a little bit. But at the end of the day, we've still got to go out there and compete at a high level to give ourselves a good chance against Colorado. Trying to maintain focus and not allow any of those kind of outside conversations to take away our focus, but our guys are excited to get out there tomorrow for sure.

Q. On rebounding Colorado has very similar numbers to you. You guys have played physical all season, but the balance of that with the front court rotation, not fouling --

TODD GOLDEN: Sorry, the question is?

Q. How key the rebounding battle is going to be and how to play physical without fouling tomorrow.

TODD GOLDEN: Yeah, they're one of the best defensive rebounding teams percentage-wise in America. I think that's going to be a big part of this game. Are we going to be able to go in there and get second and third opportunities? That's been a big part of why I've been successful offensively. It's a huge reason why they're good defensively.

Whoever wins that matchup, I think that'll be a big part of this game tomorrow.

We've got to figure out ways to prevent ourselves from getting in foul trouble tomorrow. Early on -- sorry, I shouldn't say early on, but before Micah's injury we could play through some foul trouble and know we have depth at both the 4 and the 5 to be able to steal minutes if we need to, whereas we don't have that luxury tomorrow as much. We'll try to find some ways to keep -- specifically Tyrese and Condo out of foul trouble. Tommy does a pretty good job of that. But we've got to be mindful of that over the course of the game for sure.

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