

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

Friday, March 22, 2024

Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Gainbridge Fieldhouse

Florida Gators

Todd Golden

Zyon Pullin

Tyrese Samuel

Will Richard

Media Conference

Colorado 102, Florida 100

TODD GOLDEN: Incredibly proud of my team. I thought they've been great for us all year. Today was no different. Obviously we didn't defend the way we needed to to give ourselves a great chance to win.

But on the glass and offensively I thought we did a pretty good job most of the game, and proud of the way we responded going down 10 in the second half. We're down 13 with 5:23 to go and like all year, this group stayed the course, stayed together, kept fighting. Found a way to tie that thing up late, and one possession away from getting that thing to overtime.

Disappointed because this group had the ability to make a little bit of a run. We got a tough draw getting Colorado in this game. They're 21st overall in KenPom. No other 10 seed is above 33rd. That's just the way it goes sometimes. They're a very good team. I expect them to play Marquette very well on Sunday.

Q. When you guys rallied there at the end, what was the message to your guys and what do you feel like they did to tie it up?

TODD GOLDEN: Obviously we just got a little bit more aggressive defensively. I probably should have got us in that a little earlier.



With that being said, I, again, thought they kept their composure really well. Even though we were down a little bit and we were struggling, our guys weren't hanging their heads. They were staying positive and staying together.

Obviously we pressured them. They were throwing the ball around a little bit. We hit some big shots. Did a good job attacking the rim, and obviously Walt hit a huge three to tie that thing up.

Same story as all year, our team has been pretty resilient. For us to cut that thing and tie it being down 13, I'm really proud of the way we responded.

Q. Walk us through what you saw on that final possession and how that unfolded for Colorado.

TODD GOLDEN: I saw them throw it in to Simpson, and I thought ZP did an incredible job staying down and staying between him and the basket, and Simpson somehow got about five feet of separation off ZP, and made a really tough skilled shot from the baseline.

But again, I thought ZP did his job. Stayed in legal guarding position. Stayed between the ball and the basket, and again somehow Simpson just created about seven feet of separation to get that shot off.

Q. Were you surprised how that unfolded, given how many fouls were called in the second half combined?

TODD GOLDEN: Not at all.

Q. Why is that?

TODD GOLDEN: I just wasn't surprised that that wasn't called.

Q. For the players, for Zyon and Tyrese especially, can you sum up what this game means, sum up this run you guys made, just being Gators?

ZYON PULLIN: Yeah, it was special. I appreciate this coaching staff and these players for embracing me. The season didn't finish the way we anticipated, but I can't be



more thankful to put this jersey on.

Definitely something we'll learn from and get better from.

TYRESE SAMUEL: Yeah, same here, so I just can't thank the coaches enough for bringing this group together. We had a great run. Obviously a lot of people didn't want us here in March Madness. They thought we were going to finish ninth in the SEC and we finished sixth or whatever the case was.

Obviously it's not the finish we wanted, but I think we put on for Florida and we put Florida back on the map, and this is the foundation that's set, and the standards that are only going to get better from here.

Q. Losses like this can be kind of tough, especially when you come back from a deficit and you close it and you kind of feel the glory coming to you, but how do you keep your heads up and still praise yourselves and all the accomplishments that you've had this season?

WILL RICHARD: Yeah, it's definitely a tough loss for us, but nobody thought we'd get to this point, so we're still proud of each other, proud of this group, and just keep our head up, improve from it and stuff like that. Definitely still look at the brighter side. Nobody expected us to get here. So proud of this group and we did make it this way. So it's something to definitely hang your head up high on.

TYRESE SAMUEL: Just to piggyback on what he said, obviously it's not the finish that we wanted but we've been through so much this year, you can only smile at the end of it. Obviously it's not the result we wanted. We lost off a game-winner, but that doesn't matter at the end of the day. Sometimes we're the winning team. It happens sometimes.

Basketball, it's bound to happen. I'm just happy what our team did this year. Can't really complain. They'll be back next year and they'll be a lot better. I'm just excited to see what's yet to come for obviously the seniors and the players for next year, as well.

Q. Todd, you're not a coach that gets T'ed up much. What happened on that sequence and with the whistle, and how frustrating was that?

TODD GOLDEN: Yeah, just a confusing situation. A very delayed and-one call. Then explained that he tried to blow his whistle but his whistle wasn't working but nobody saw him call a foul until about five seconds after the play.

I wasn't very happy about it. I thought it was a really -- it's

never happened to me in my coaching career where somebody's whistle doesn't work, and then five seconds later we're finding out that it's an and-one, and then he asked me to get in the box, and I said I was in the box and then he gave me a technical.

I've had three technicals in my coaching career. He has given me two of them.

Q. Career-high 33 points from Walter tonight. What did you think about his performance, and how much can he be something to build on next year if he decides to come back?

TODD GOLDEN: Yeah, Walt is a fantastic player. Got a lot of heart, got a lot of belief. Along with these three up here, he believed the whole time that we could get back in the game. Did a great job attacking the rim late, obviously hit that big three to tie it up.

He's a stud, man. He's a Gator. We're fortunate to have him.

Q. Obviously with everything that's happened with this team, is this the closest team you've been a part of? How close really is this team?

ZYON PULLIN: I'd definitely say it's probably the closest team I've been on. From the stuff on the court to off the court, guys just wanting to be around each other, something that stands out, and I can't thank these guys enough for just, like I said earlier, just embracing me. We've got a bunch of guys great on this team, and I'd say we're pretty connected.

TODD GOLDEN: This team is fantastic that way. I feel like our team talent is just really good. I've been fortunate enough to be around a lot of teams that get along well. I thought my last team in San Francisco was great that way. We had great camaraderie, great togetherness, and this team has reminded me a lot of that group and the way they're together. They don't have to force it. They don't have to manufacture it. These guys enjoy being around each other, and it's part of why we've been so successful this year.

So we'll continue to -- my hope is that it'll continue to be that way as this group grows and as our program grows, but these guys have laid a great foundation for us that way for sure.

Q. Alex did not play like a freshman tonight. Can you explain his feelings about his play tonight, especially in his matchup with Eddie?



TODD GOLDEN: He's been huge for us all year. He's come off the bench, but he along with Tommy, have been right there with Reese and Micah as super important players for us, especially in the front court.

Obviously kind of thrust into a tough situation getting his first start in an NCAA Tournament game, but we knew and I think these guys would agree that he'd be ready to compete and ready to fight. It's one of his best qualities as a player.

He fouled out, but six points, seven rebounds, six assists, only one turnover, I thought he did a good job out there super old fifth-year senior in Lampkin, who's a super good player.

Q. Just watching this team battle back like they have in times past, how much did you just think, oh, we've got this, and then walking off the floor, how much of a building block can this still be as you move forward?

TODD GOLDEN: Yeah, along with these guys, I always believed we had a chance. It wasn't looking great for a while, but once we pressured them a little bit and they started throwing it around, I felt like if we could make some shots, we'd give ourselves a chance.

Again, we did what we needed to do obviously to tie the game and I thought we had a pretty good defensive possession on the last possession, and it just didn't go our way.

Really proud of where this program is right now, the way this team has played all year, 24 wins in our league is really hard to do. We obviously had 14 league wins, if you combine the regular season and the SEC tournament, and that's something to be super proud of. And like Tyrese said, my hope is that this will be a building block for the program.

We're going to miss ZP and Tyrese a lot. They're going to be hard to replace. But the goal is that these younger guys will continue to grow and get better, and we'll find guys that are the right fit with great attitudes and great work ethics and really will want to be Gators. We'll continue to build it that way because it's what I believe in and it's worked for us.

A good building block season for us, and our hope is to continue to raise the bar as we move forward.

Q. Zyon, did you think you got a little bit of a shoulder on that last play into maybe one of the other players? Was it difficult to get a feel of the way the game was being called, especially when whistles aren't working?

ZYON PULLIN: I mean, just trying to keep playing the game, let the fouls kind of come. But I mean, just some tough plays down the stretch, getting started and stuff like that. I don't know, it happens. It's basketball.

Q. Being here is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. You have a lot of young basketball stars looking up to you. Do you have any advice for them, anything you've learned in these moments?

TYRESE SAMUEL: Yeah, just got to accept it sometimes. Sometimes it's not always going to go your way, and there's always going to be a lot of basketball to be played. Like we have a lot of freshmen and sophomores, and if they all decide to stay together, they're going to be great in the long run, and it's just going to help Florida basketball grow.

Like from Condo to Will, all them, this team is going to be great next year as long as we just add the right pieces, I think they could make a bigger run than we did this year, so I'm excited to see them.

WILL RICHARD: I agree with what Tyrese said. Just don't take any game for granted. It's a blessing being able to play the game that you love and the game that you dreamed of playing, especially at this level. Just have fun with it. Just take every game, every workout, just everything and cherish it because basketball doesn't lie. It doesn't dribble for a long time. Just enjoy it while you can.

ZYON PULLIN: Yeah, I mean, kind of what he said, just cherishing it all. You're not promised to keep playing and stuff like that. I think just cherishing every single day, just keep showing up, just keep working because it all comes to an end, especially -- it goes by pretty fast.

I think just embracing every gle day and just keep working.

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