

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: Second Round - UConn vs Florida

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Lenovo Center

Florida Gators

Todd Golden

Media Conference



TODD GOLDEN: The way we're trying to attack it is obviously. Even though we might be favored, I think a lot of people still believe that UConn is going to win this game because of their track record, because of Coach Hurley and the success that they've had.

It's on us to make sure we go out there and show what we're capable of. I think they've done so well, they've been so consistent. Obviously Coach Hurley has been here before. They have multiple players that have won National Championships that expect to win this time of year. For us, this is a relatively new position for us with the chance to advance to play in the Sweet 16.

It gives us an opportunity to keep the chip on our shoulder. I do still think the main people that think we're going to advance is the people in our locker room. We've got to make sure that we play that way tomorrow.

Q. UConn plays split two bigs and they both play very different styles. How are you preparing Alex Condon for that type of role to play to adjust to whether Tarris or Samson is on the court?

TODD GOLDEN: We've got to do everything we can on a short prep to prepare our guys. To your point, Samson and Tarris are both great players, but they're way different. Samson has done an incredible job providing a rim threat in the ball screen and the handoff game. I think I saw he's shooting like 75 percent from 2 or something this year, which is ridiculous. So we've got to be mindful of that and not let him get behind us in the ball screen.

Then Tarris is a great player, but he's more of a low post scorer, more of a guy that they can throw it to on the low block and allow him to try to get a basket.

The coverages are going to be a lot different depending on who's in the game. Micah and Reuben are going to have to be mindful of that and do a really good job of being able to execute on a short prep.

Q. I was wondering how much of an influence Billy Donovan may have been to you and the program since you've been here? Has he kind of offered you advice, helped you at all and the team? I know he's been somewhat of a sounding board for Dan Hurley in

THE MODERATOR: Good afternoon once again. At this time, we're going to open up the floor for questions for Coach Golden.

Q. Todd, a lot of coaches have praised your roster construction, and I'm just curious, maybe even going back to your first year, that UConn game, how much did that kind of provide the blueprint to where you are now in terms of seeing that team and what they did that night against you guys?

TODD GOLDEN: It definitely opened my eyes to how much we needed to improve to be able to compete at the highest level. What Coach Hurley has been able to do over the last few years is remarkable, hasn't lost in March in three years, I think 13 in a row, if I saw that correctly this morning.

The thing that I appreciated most about their teams is obviously their talent was really, really special. They have multiple guys now playing in the NBA, but just how well they played together and how in sync and in unison they competed.

It did, it provided a good just -- not necessarily the blueprint, but our goal was to try to build something similar. I feel like we are in a really good spot right now three years in, in the sense of building a team that enjoys playing together that's really deep.

Q. Given their success, track record, and just the tradition -- I mean, six national titles since '99 -- what's kind of the mental component that your team is going to have to have to set that aside? I know you guys are very confident guys, but is there an initial like, hey, this is UConn. We belong or whatever. Is there anything like that?



recent years for different things, but have you developed a good relationship with him?

TODD GOLDEN: Coach Donovan's been amazing to me since I got the job. I remember -- I believe it was the day after, I was fortunate enough to get this position, he called me and just said -- or I might have called him after getting his number. He was awesome. He was like whatever -- as much as you want to connect with me or as little, I just want you to know I'm here for you and that I want you to be really, really successful.

That meant a lot. He was helpful for sure, kind of getting through the first couple months. Then the funny thing is, developed a really good relationship with his father, who still lives in Gainesville. Myself, Duke Werner, my sports supervisor, and Billy D. Sr. go out to breakfast once a quarter, I would say. He definitely still likes to be around ball and talk ball, and that's been really neat.

I got to play golf with Coach Donovan this summer and we had a great time, just talking about hoop and talking about life a little bit. He's been really awesome. After big wins, he'll shoot us a text. After the SEC Championship last Sunday, he shot us a nice note congratulating us on the success.

To me, to have someone who's had so much success and been such a remarkable coach at this level, to be so humble to reach out and offer his support, it means a lot to me.

Q. Would you talk about how development of this program, you've gone from a team that was pretty passive and aggressive your first year to one that has become very, very capable of playing physical games? You're playing a team that maybe is as physical as there is in the country.

TODD GOLDEN: Honestly, that has a lot to do with the recruiting. We were able to get -- after year one, obviously we added Micah and Tyrese and ZP and Walt. This year obviously adding Reuben and Alijah, now we have a collective group that enjoys playing physically and plays with an edge.

We've tried to be pretty consistent in our messaging as coaches over the years. I just think this group has it a little more that way and they're more receptive to the physicality and they like to run to the fight.

So the players deserve a lot of credit for that. The coaches do a really good job of putting our guys in position, but our players are the ones that go out and execute and are willing to kind of get nasty and get physical. I think it's

going to be really important for us to win this game tomorrow. We've got to be able to do that against UConn tomorrow.

Q. It's just the second round, but with it being UConn and being a 1 seed and with what you're building, how big does this moment feel, or how pivotal is this for the program that you're trying to build?

TODD GOLDEN: It's a huge moment. You've got an opportunity to go play, if you can find a way to win this game tomorrow, to go to the Sweet 16. Our goal being at Florida is to play deep into March and April and compete for championships.

Obviously we've had a remarkable season. We won 31 games to this point. But I don't think we'll be as satisfied as we could be if we're not victorious tomorrow.

Every game at this point is huge, going to be really impactful to our program and the trajectory that we're trying to continue on, but yeah, this game is definitely important. We're not running from that.

Q. Todd, you guys knocked off Auburn earlier this season and snapped, I think it was, a 14-game winning streak and a 30-game winning streak. I don't know how mindful you guys were of that going into the game, but knowing they can snap a 13-game winning streak for UConn, does that provide any extra motivation for them in the tournament?

TODD GOLDEN: In the tournament? Okay. They haven't won 13 in a row. That would be awesome. That's part of the message with the guys. UConn at this time of year, they believe they're going to win. They go into games believing they're going to win, whether they're 1 seed or 8, which they are now, I can't imagine that changes Alex Karaban's mentality.

He's coming in here to try to bust our butt tomorrow. I know Coach Hurley is the same. He's no different. He's just expecting to win tomorrow.

So we've got to make sure we go out there and just match that mentality and be physically and mentally tough for 40 minutes and do everything we can to knock them off the perch a little bit.

But it's going to be a huge challenge. I do think our guys are excited about it and ready for it.

Q. I know Coach has never liked to talk about games beyond the game ahead of him, but when you saw the bracket and you saw UConn a two-time defending

champion in the second round, after winning the SEC I'm curious what your thoughts are. And the second part of the question is what is your biggest concern? What do you guys have to do to beat them tomorrow?

TODD GOLDEN: Again, I thought it was a pretty fair draw, to be honest. I think they were 34 in KenPom, and Oklahoma was 37 in KenPom at the time. Gonzaga was an 8 seed, and I think they were 10 in KenPom. We got a fair draw that way. Their program and expectation probably made it a little more difficult seeing them.

Once you get to this point in March, every team you're playing is really good. We weren't thinking too much more about that.

I'm sorry. What was the second part of the question? What do we need to do to beat UConn?

I think we have to do a great job of taking them out of what they want to do in the half-court offensively. They run a lot of really, really good stuff. Misdirections, drifts, pindowns, lots of different actions to make their shooter and playmakers available. We've got to be mindful and do a really good job being on the scout. I think defensive communication is huge tomorrow. We've got to make sure we're all on the same page and all five guys are working together that way.

We've got to make sure we execute like we did in the SEC Tournament. I thought our team was elite in all three games, executing on both sides of the ball. Yesterday we did it for 15 minutes. We've got to do it for 40 tomorrow, though, if we want to beat this team.

Q. It's been a long time since a team has won three straight National Championships. If you guys are able to beat UConn and end that chapter, how important would that be, and how motivational would that be?

TODD GOLDEN: It would be exciting for us just because we get to move on. We're not too worried about UConn in terms of their path and what they've done. It's more about us. I think we'd be incredibly excited because we'd be able to get back -- for this program to get back to the Sweet 16 and get back to kind of where this program was 10 years ago.

I think that's the biggest thing for us as a program is continuing to try to get Gator basketball back where it has been over the past 20 years -- winning National Championships, going to Final Fours, playing in Sweet 16s, things of that nature.

Q. Does that second half last night give you kind of a

hammer with the team a little bit, maybe instead of them cruising to like a 40-point win?

TODD GOLDEN: To be honest, the last four minutes of the first half gave me that hammer. It was addressed at halftime. We were playing fantastic. We were up, I think, 51-19, and Norfolk's a good team. We were just playing about as good as you can play.

We took a breath, and a good team punishes you when you do that. We made sure at halftime that our guys understood it wasn't acceptable, and they knew that. I thought Norfolk played well again in the second half.

I'm not concerned about it moving forward, though. I think our guys do a good job of raising to the level of our competition, making sure that we compete at an insanely high level. They understand that, if we don't do that against UConn, we're going to be going home tomorrow.

Q. With 10 being the standard for an over-under, was your anger at halftime over or under?

TODD GOLDEN: Over or under 10? It was under, 9.5.

Q. UConn leads the country in blocked shots. What have they done so well there? Do you feel like your guys' size can make that not as much of a concern?

TODD GOLDEN: Their bigs are great at protecting the rim. The way they guard defensively, it allows them a little more free rein to go swing at shots and do a great job with their rim protection.

We're definitely mindful of that in terms of the way we want to attack them tomorrow and do what we can to keep bodies on them, to not let them get free runs, to go block shots. That's where our physicality has got to show up, and our bigs have to do a good job of owning the paint, owning the block, and not letting Johnson and Reed be free to go roam and protect.

So that will be a huge part of our offensive success tomorrow. I think, if we can execute that, we'll do a better job.

Q. Todd, I think it was 10 for 31 from 3. What were your thoughts about maybe some of the shots that you guys took from out there and maybe the familiarity also being in the arena second time in terms of shooting?

TODD GOLDEN: I thought we took pretty good shots. Obviously Walter was unconscious for the first half and made some bombs and some really tough shots, but he

makes tough shots look easy.

I thought the rest of our guys took good shots. Tommy went 0 for 5. I thought he took five good 3s. We'll stay the course on that. I think we'll shoot the ball better collectively tomorrow.

Q. Walter faced this team with Iona two years ago. Obviously a different team than the team that won the National Championship. Did Walter tell the team at all about the play style that UConn has, just facing them from a past perspective?

TODD GOLDEN: He hasn't addressed the team about it, but he definitely has a good understanding, being in this position to compete against them. As we talked about, a couple of the guys are still on the team for UConn that played in that game, so there's some familiarity that way.

That experience for him will definitely help us tomorrow for sure.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, you're excused. Thank you very much. Good luck tomorrow.

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