

# NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: Regional Semifinal - Arkansas vs Florida

Thursday, March 27, 2025  
San Francisco, California, USA  
Chase Center

**Florida Gators**

**Coach Todd Golden**

**Rueben Chinyelu**

**Denzel Aberdeen**

Sweet 16 Postgame Media Conference

Florida - 87, Maryland - 71

**TODD GOLDEN:** Really proud of our group. Thought we competed really well. First half thought we were a little casual with the basketball. And put ourselves into some predicaments and kept the game tight.

Second half we did a much better job taking care of it. Thought we competed really well defensively. Did a great job on the glass all night. And with our ability to get shots every time, we were able to extend the lead.

Credit to Maryland. They have a great team. They had an incredible year. But really proud of my guys. And we're really pleased to be playing on Saturday.

**Q. Denzel, can you speak to the carelessness with the ball? Looked a lot like UConn last night but it might have been worse actually. What was going on?**

**DENZEL ABERDEEN:** I think we got a little lazy in the first half. We were kind of being loose with the ball, not really paying attention to the guards from coming behind, tapping the ball out of our hands and stuff like that.

But I think we picked it up the second half. We got together. We talked about it and stuff like that in the locker room. We said in order for us to win the game, we have to take care of the ball. That's what we did in the second half.

**Q. Denzel, I think it was a 29-3 edge in bench points. The ability for you to come in and produce and**



**Thomas to come in and produce with Alex obviously being out with the injury in the first half, how important was that? I know it's something you guys have done all year long, but what kind of pride do you guys take in doing that off the bench on a nightly basis?**

**DENZEL ABERDEEN:** Yes, sir, it was very important. Me, Tommy and the rest of the guys on the bench, we come in with great energy. That's what we try to do every game. We try to defend. Whether it's on defense or offense, we just try to get a push on the edge because then they got a little tired in the second half. We kind of used our depth to our advantage. And we pushed the pace on defense and got out in transition. And just everybody being ready, whoever's name is called, I think that's what we did.

**Q. Denzel, just the unselfishness in the second half, six assists I think on the first eight baskets. And Rueben, the rebounding advantage, 40-22, what did you think of that?**

**DENZEL ABERDEEN:** I thought it was very good. Everybody shared the ball. Everybody was very unselfish this game. The second half, like we said, when we kind of picked it up the second half, we were talking more on defense, coming more together offensively. And we got knock-down shooters, got great guards and great bigs just to clean up our misses. We picked it up in the second half, came together as a team.

**RUEBEN CHINYELU:** I would say we're just taking pride in what we have been doing all year. Just coming in and going in and cleaning the boards, and doing whatever it takes to get our teammates going, which is like getting a rebound, every opportunity we have to get it. Just being able to embrace that.

**Q. You guys coming in conceptual-wise had a big advantage in the front court. Condon goes down, you get in foul trouble. What were you talking about how you combat this adversity against you guys in the first half?**

**RUEBEN CHINYELU:** Well, it's something I think we have seen all year. So we were just being able to keep our poise in that moment and know it's just us against us. And blocking out all the noise out there and just focusing on us

and trusting each other.

And I think that's what keeps us going, the trust we have in each other, because we know that at any given day, once we step on the court, we come out and put out our all, we give it all we had. I think that's something we do, coming out, enjoying it, even if something didn't go our way.

Just being able to be positive with any outcome and that's going (indiscernible) that moment. Trying to be positive and working and trusting each other. I think that's something that kept us going.

**Q. Did you kind of feel them wearing out? They didn't play a ton of guys. You guys subbed in a lot of guys, a lot of guys scored. How did that change the game in the second half?**

DENZEL ABERDEEN: I think it changed it very well in the second half as we pushed the lead. Their guys, like you said, got very tired. We used our depth to our advantage. Tommy coming in big time, drawing fouls and stuff like that, coming in, rebounding, stuff.

Everybody being ready to shoot off the bench. Walt, he does what he does. Will does what he does. And Alijah do what he do. But having people back them up help them on the defensive end, I think that's a great thing for us.

RUEBEN CHINYELU: I would say just being able to make use of the opportunity we have. Whichever opportunity shows itself we just go out there, grab it and do what we have to do, just play basketball and enjoy it.

**Q. What can you say it's been like to be on the ride together and just what you've taken away from this season knowing there's more life to this and there's more opportunities for the Gators to show who they are?**

DENZEL ABERDEEN: I think this ride has been amazing. We got a group of guys, we all gel together very well. We are all like brothers.

Being in this moment, being part of this journey, being here in the Sweet 16 it's a blessing to be here in general, but we know it's not done yet. We've still got a job to finish. We just have to keep going.

RUEBEN CHINYELU: Just say enjoying the moment, enjoying the brotherhood, the love that we get from each other. Just being able to be part of that is something amazing, something that anyone would want to be, just being able to know your brother has your back and you've got their back, just being able to support you no matter

what's happening.

Just being able to be part of that, I think it's a beautiful thing for all of us. And I think we all would testify to that. Just being able to be in that group, that brotherhood, it's something we love and we just don't want it to stop.

**Q. You guys feel like that second half was the kind of basketball you guys, when you're at your best? Because we hadn't really seen that kind of in the tournament. You kind of did it when you needed it?**

RUEBEN CHINYELU: I would say that second half, that was us -- at the beginning of the game we started, as Denzel said, we started slow, not taking care of the ball. In order to achieve what we have to, we have to take care of the ball, love the ball because it's precious. Just being able to get back to loving that and just know that, okay, this is my cake, I need to hold it real tight.

**Q. I know you're new coming in. You probably had a little bit of a depth advantage. Alex goes down. How did that impact your rotation, even the ability to get something from him in the second half in terms of keeping that rotation intact and being able to get the bench production you did?**

TODD GOLDEN: Yeah, we definitely thought, not just specific to Maryland, but we feel like our depth is one of our biggest strengths regardless of who we're competing against. Our first half, Condon goes down. It was a couple minutes into the game.

We just got out of sorts a little bit. We had to play Tommy pretty much the whole first half. He did a great job but he started getting fatigued. As we were talking about, we were just very careless with the basketball in the first half.

I thought we did a good job on the glass. I thought we did a good job defending them. We were able to go into the halftime with a lead even though 13 turnovers in the first half.

Once we got there, we were able to recalibrate a little bit. And the message was simple. We've got to keep defending. Obviously continue to stay aggressive on the glass, but we have to do a better job taking care of the ball. If we didn't do that, you know, we would have put ourselves in jeopardy of going home tonight.

We were elite in the second half. We did a great job staying aggressive, handling their pressure and their quickness and their length. Our defense stayed consistent. We were awesome on the glass all night, both sides of the ball. And we started taking advantage of the opportunities

we got in transition. That allowed us to step on the gas a little bit and break away from them.

**Q. You know Maryland's proclivity, even though they only had a five-man starting squad playing 30, 35 minutes was second half over the last 20 games. How concerned were you at halftime? And what did you say to the team to flip the switch?**

TODD GOLDEN: I was concerned because I think Maryland's really good. They've been playing like a top-five or six team in America over their last 10 ball games. You see the talent with Queen. He's an amazing talent. And every guy in their starting lineup has unique skills that make them really difficult.

But, to be honest, as you said, the message was simple. We have to take care of the ball. We had 13 turnovers in the first half. And our goal as a team is to limit ourselves to 12 for the game. So the fact that we were able to still have a lead, it gave us some hope that if we clean that up, that we would be in good shape in the second half.

So the message was simple to our guys: It was really just about us and making sure we do what we talk about a lot, which is defending, rebounding and valuing the basketball.

**Q. Would you talk about you had a couple of consecutive dunks there by -- you got the ball into Rueben, and that just sort of turned the whole team on. It's like the switch went on for everybody.**

TODD GOLDEN: Yeah, I think that was a moment where we might have started wearing them down a little bit. We were making them chase us. Again, we were valuing the basketball so we were making them guard for the majority of the shot clock.

And we were able to get some slips on the pick-and-rolls for Rueben. He did a great job catching the ball in tight spaces and dunking it. And we were able to keep our foot on the gas that way.

But Rueben had a monster game. I thought he was impactful in a lot of different ways. I sound like a broken record, but our ability to take care of the ball in the second half was the difference in the ball game.

**Q. Randy Bennett did come tonight.**

TODD GOLDEN: Did he?

**Q. He didn't ask you for a ticket?**

TODD GOLDEN: I didn't see him.

**Q. I texted him to ask if he was here he said, of course I wouldn't miss it. I wondered if he reached out to you or said more than he's working on the portal?**

TODD GOLDEN: Coach did not tell me he was coming tonight. That's just kind of how he operates. But it means the world to me.

I saw Coach Kyle here as well. And those guys have been so impactful for me and my life. I've known them since I was 17 years old. And just the joy that Coach Smith had being around us -- we've all been together for a long time.

A lot of these guys on my staff here at Florida were with us at Columbia when Coach Smith got his first job. I know he's proud of the work we're doing. I know Coach Bennett is really proud of the work we're doing as well.

For me, I'm proud that my program and our program is performing the way it is. A lot of it has to do with kind of the base and just experiences that I had with them over my five years in Moraga.

**Q. Going back to your playing days, I imagine as a head coach you haven't gotten this deep in the tournament. Bigger picture, what's the exhilaration like, what's the vibe like when you get to this level? Each round you advance. How significant is it where you -- you're in Raleigh one week, you're here -- it's a very unique sporting event compared to Super Bowl, World Series, whatever. I'm just curious the experience, the journey, what it's like for you and what you expect Saturday to be like?**

TODD GOLDEN: It's surreal, to be honest. The thing that I keep kind of going back to is that selfishly and personally I just don't want it to end.

We have a uniquely tight group. My staff has done a fantastic job all year. It's our third year being together. Obviously we've had a couple guys that have benefited from our success. They're going to be getting head jobs here when this run's over.

But the key for me and my staff and our players, we can't take a second of this for granted. It's been an amazing run. We won 33 games this year, you know? It's incredibly hard to do.

We've kind of had a great rip through the best league in college basketball over the last 20 years. Won an SEC championship. Now we're playing well at the right time and have an opportunity on Saturday to play our way into the Final Four.



It's an amazing experience. I'm not necessarily surprised. This group has been working in unison since June and they've been looking out for each other. We knew early we had a really great group of young men that would pull for each other and play the right way.

And our team talent has really taken over. I thought that showed tonight in the second half with the way we kind of put our foot on the gas down the stretch.

**Q. Can you speak to Denzel's big shots at big times. But also one sequence that came at a tough time when Alex was on the ground and pushed the ball to the basket.**

TODD GOLDEN: And Micah put it in. That was a hell of a play.

**Q. It was just a huge play at the time because it was during their comeback.**

TODD GOLDEN: Denzel was fantastic tonight. He did an incredible job. He was in there when we kind of iced, kind of from the 10-minute to 4. He gave us a great stretch, hit a big 3. I think that extended it back to 15 when they were starting to get baskets.

He just played with great confidence tonight. He was fearless. He attacked for all 20 minutes he was out there. He gave us a big lift.

Condo, we didn't know we were going to have him in the second half. Credit to him, he wanted to be out there with his teammates. He fought to get back out on the court. Loose ball, just dives on it, makes a winning play. Pops it up to Micah and he tips it a couple times puts the ball in.

Those are back-breakers. When your energy and your extra effort lead to baskets or turnovers, when you're on the defensive end, those kind of deflate your opponents. I thought our guys did a wonderful job over the last 20 minutes of the game making play after play that kept them at bay.

**Q. When you have the depth that you have and you can sub guys in and there's not much drop-off, where they have five guys who kind of play most of the game, is that a comfort on the bench? How do you go about looking at the game and seeing maybe they're getting tired and this is where we can mash the accelerator in the second half?**

TODD GOLDEN: You have to trust in the first half simply because they're not going to wear down that much at that

point. Our bench did a good job. I thought Urbi was a little tight out there, but Zel was fantastic. And Tommy gave us 30-something minutes because of Condo's injury.

And Micah, foul trouble in the first half, but big minutes in the second half.

A big thing we talked about as a staff in our prep is regardless of what's going on, we've got to trust our bench and know that's a huge advantage for us tonight.

And obviously with Condo going down, I don't think we were able to even take as much advantage as we really would have wanted to with him only getting 13 minutes. We didn't play Urb as much.

But the way Tommy and Micah and Zel gave us minutes off the bench was huge. They were the difference in a lot of ways. Our bench, we outscored them 29-3 bench scoring. I think that was a huge difference in the game as well.

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