

# NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: Regional Final - Texas Tech vs Florida

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Chase Center

**Florida Gators**

**Coach Todd Golden**

**Thomas Haugh**

**Alex Condon**

Elite Eight Pregame Media Conference



just have a good bond because we're pretty similar guys. We both work pretty hard on the court. I love playing with Tommy. Anytime we get to share the court, it's a pleasure. It's awesome.

THOMAS HAUGH: I agree. He's a lot weirder than me, but I agree.

**Q. After your game last night, did you watch Texas Tech's comeback? And if so, what stands out about them as a team and what do you look for tomorrow?**

THOMAS HAUGH: They're a really good team. They have two really good bigs that they play to and they've got a good rim-protector big. And their guards can all shoot.

It's going to be a really good game. We've got to stick to the scout, stick to the game plan.

**Q. Alex, what do you make of the effort that Thomas gives? And then Thomas, I mean you obviously have a lot of skill, but we've asked you this, too, but how do you just sell out like that pretty much every minute, second you're on the court?**

ALEX CONDON: He plays with an unbelievable amount of effort. Every time he steps on the court he's willing to dive on loose balls. He just does a lot of little stuff that helps us win. The one percenter is a good example, the tip-out to Zel that just shows how Thomas turns out and plays basketball. He does a lot of stuff to help us win. It's great.

THOMAS HAUGH: What was the second part?

**Q. Skill level, just the effort that you give constantly elevating you to another level.**

THOMAS HAUGH: I don't know, I think it's just what the team needs out of me. Just growing up, Pennsylvania is scrappy a little bit. Growing up like that and going to my prep school, we were known to be a bunch of scrappy guys. Bringing it to the college level has helped me a lot. And I think my coaches and where I grew up is part of that, too.

**Q. Neither of you are particularly small humans, but you have a very big teammate in Olivier. I was**

**Q. Alex, obviously how are you feeling? 24 hours later. How did practice go for you today, and how ready do you feel you're ready for Texas Tech tomorrow?**

ALEX CONDON: Feel pretty good, a lot of treatment over the past 12 hours or so. Getting with the trainers, making sure my ankle is going to be good for the Texas game. I feel like I'll be ready to go for tomorrow.

We'll see how it goes. That's the plan as of right now. I didn't practice today, just kind of take a little weight off my foot and rest up before the game.

**Q. Alex, what was your initial reaction when you had your injury? Did you think it was worse than what it was?**

ALEX CONDON: Initially, it was just a bit of a shock. It's the same ankle, so I was pretty frustrated it was the same ankle again. But after that, probably 15 minutes, I knew it wasn't as bad. Just keeping optimistic with it and just keep playing basketball, we'll be good.

**Q. There's a real bond between the two of you, almost a brother-like bond. Alex, what do you find kind of quirky in him? And Tommy, what do you find kind of quirky in Alex?**

ALEX CONDON: There's a lot of quirky stuff about him.

THOMAS HAUGH: I could say the same thing.

ALEX CONDON: I don't know about quirky, but I think we



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**wondering if you could walk me through your first impression of him when you first met him and what it's like to play with someone who is 7'9"?**

THOMAS HAUGH: It's crazy. First time I saw him it was kind of wild. He came on his visit. It's just wild seeing him. He's a really good dude off the court. I know he gets swarmed with pictures and stuff. He is really good about that. He's a really good dude.

ALEX CONDON: Same.

**Q. What have you thought about your barefoot excursions that you've been on this trip (indiscernible) you did a beeline to the water today? What has that meant for you guys just to get out of the hotel, do something like that? Have you enjoyed those things and what have been your thoughts on those?**

ALEX CONDON: It's something new we've been trying. We've been doing it just for the March Madness tournament. Just getting out, I think it's good -- we do it the day before game day usually, I think. And just get outside. We went to the San Francisco Bay Area Bridge. And just get to see the sights while we're traveling around the country. I know it's a unique experience for a lot of guys on the team. Just get outside and get some grounding, it's cool.

THOMAS HAUGH: Same thing. I liked the ocean today. It was cool.

**Q. Can you imagine what it's like to be 7'9" in normal life, not basketball, in normal life? You referenced how good he is with photos. That's got to be a difficult way to go through life. I'm curious what your thoughts are about what that would be like or what he's shared with you.**

THOMAS HAUGH: I feel that would stink a little bit in some aspects, the airplane and stuff like that. But I don't know. He does a good job of not complaining and stuff. He's a good dude, Big O.

**Q. Alex, I understand you were a pretty good Australian rules football player growing up. You were serious about that sport before switching focusing on basketball full time. Could you walk us through that decision and if there's anything you can take from that sport that's helpful in basketball?**

ALEX CONDON: Yeah, Australian rules football was my first sport I started playing. My parents put me in a lot of different sports growing up. I think it helped me develop a lot of different skills. A lot of hand-eye coordination

transfers from that. And the physicality of the game, a lot of big hits.

We play a lot of big guys in the SEC, so being able to initiate contact with them, and I'm probably not as big and strong as them but I'm willing to push them around and try to annoy them a bit. That's what I got from that.

**Q. What do you think separates Todd maybe from other coaches? We know he's young and relatable and all that. But in terms of just what he's taught you guys and what he can get out of your guys. I know there's some [inaudible] because he found you while others didn't.**

THOMAS HAUGH: Coach Golden is one of the guys. He's at practice running around with us and stuff. And like you said, he's a super relatable guy, a player's coach. You don't see that nowadays.

A lot of head coaches just sit up in their office, don't come down, don't do anything with the players.

But Coach Golden comes in the weight room, joking with us. It creates a bond within our team that's leading to the success we're at right now.

ALEX CONDON: I think the best coaches are the ones who are amongst it and always active in practices and leading by example kind of, just always being there. And he shows a lot of care for his players as well.

We both weren't heavily recruited at high school. He kind of went against the grain and picked us out. So we'll always have a level of appreciation for Coach.

**Q. Talk about the process as Alex just mentioned, neither one of you were that highly recruited and yet you came here, and what was the promise? Was the promise just if you come here and work you're going to get your opportunity? What sold you on Coach Golden?**

ALEX CONDON: For me, I think Coach said I had a good opportunity to play my freshman year. We had some pretty talented front-court players. I knew it was going to be a big task.

He did promise some level of minutes my freshman year. I think just the whole coaching staff, how welcoming they were. I think another big reason why I came to Florida was Coach Hartman and how accepting he was of all the bigs. And just seeing guys like Colin Castleton, who excelled in the program before, helped me make my decision easy.

**Q. First halves the last two games, eight turnovers, 14 turnovers. Just the importance of getting off to a start. Could you put your finger on why you guys may have been disjointed the last games early?**

THOMAS HAUGH: I don't think it's a specific reason. Last game it wasn't just how we played. We came into halftime knowing if we limited the turnovers we were going to be fine.

I think sometimes we get like a little sped up. We got a little nervous yesterday. I don't think anybody was really nervous, but it just kind of just like the way the game went, we were just losing the ball too much.

I think we only had four turnovers in the second half then. You saw the end result. That's the brand of basketball we need to play.

**Q. What do you feel like has been your most complete game that you guys have played this year? And how close do you guys feel you've gotten to that in the tournament, and you still feel like your best game is still out there?**

ALEX CONDON: I think yesterday was a step in the right direction with how complete we can play. Definitely Auburn or Alabama, when we played at theirs, is two examples of the team playing well together. And I think that's the time we're the hardest to guard, when we're sharing the ball and making really good plays for each other, that's the best, that's Gator basketball.

THOMAS HAUGH: I agree. I think the Auburn game we played a complete game, other than the first five minutes, they got out to a lead and then finished it the rest of the game. But our best basketball is still to be played.

**Q. The play that you made from the floor in the second half, were you trying to make it, or were you trying to throw the alley to Micah?**

ALEX CONDON: I saw Micah standing next to me and he's good at tipping it in, so I tried to chuck it up as high as I could and it got there somehow. It was a good play, though.

**Q. Alex, have you had a chance to explain Australian rules football and cricket to Coach Golden and to Tommy, and what was their reaction?**

ALEX CONDON: Coach Golden doesn't really care about anything other than basketball. But no, Tommy knows how Australian rules football works. I think he's a little bit confused about cricket. But it's comparable to baseball in

some ways. But it's a pretty complicated sport. He's learning still to come, I think.

THOMAS HAUGH: Yeah. I don't know how cricket works. I don't really care either. I'm not going to watch it, no.

**Q. Darrion was just saying he went to some USF camps when he was in Sacramento but you guys didn't really recruit him there. How have you seen his game grow from earlier in high school to where he is now?**

TODD GOLDEN: He's a great player right now. We weren't recruiting a lot of high school kids at San Francisco. We didn't evaluate him very much I would say.

And to his credit he's turned into a great player. I think he's just really impactful, does a great job with the ball in his hands. Grant does a really good job getting him catches in positions on the floor where he can make plays.

He's a great dribbler for a front-court player. Obviously can hurt you from inside the 3, outside the 3.

I think his play making is underrated, his ability to pass the ball out of the post. Teams that have tried to run doubles at him has not been very effective against him.

And obviously he's one of the highest usage, most impactful players on a team that's alive in the Elite Eight. He's become a really good player, especially for Texas Tech.

**Q. Following up on the earlier questions about Olivier, I'm curious your experience with him, how you recruited him and what you thought to see someone -- it's one thing to recruit a 7-footer but he's 9 inches taller than that. What was that process like for you and what kind of player can he become?**

TODD GOLDEN: Olivier is obviously incredibly unique. I think he is -- he has a chance to become a very good player. As fast as we play is difficult for him, just changing directions. That's probably the biggest challenge, but there's plenty of times in practice where he makes really, really good plays.

He has a good feel, has a good understanding of the game. He's become much more physical. Vic Lopez and our training staff have done an incredible job with him. He's just moving so much better and more fluid than when he got to our program.

And when we looked at him and decided to bring him to Florida, we looked at him as kind of like a long-term investment from the standpoint of he's a great kid, comes

from a great family. We knew he would be low maintenance. We knew his best basketball would be ahead of him.

To his credit, he's a diligent worker, very quiet but consistent. I'm excited for him. He obviously doesn't play for us this year' I think it's a challenge next year. But if he sticks with it down the road, I think he can become an impactful player at some point.

**Q. What did you think about going through life away from basketball at that size?**

TODD GOLDEN: It's a huge challenge. I think something that people might think is, like, kind of cool to be recognized all the time. I'm sure for him it gets old really quick. He's walking around, everybody's begging him for a picture and looking at him funny.

But Tommy is right; he handles it gracefully and incredibly mature. Never gets upset or frustrated with people who annoy him.

I think he has displayed an incredible amount of maturity for someone his age dealing with what he's had to going through his life with being his size.

**Q. There's a couple day period last May when Walter and Will both decided to come back and not enter the draft. What was it like getting that news when maybe they were on the fence, maybe they weren't, just knowing that what they would bring to the team this year?**

TODD GOLDEN: It was obviously incredible news for us. We were very excited to learn that they were coming back.

That specific question is, I would say, one of the biggest challenges in our job as coaches these days is kind of navigating roster construction, especially when you have guys that are talented enough to kind of see what their NBA prospects are. And the way that the portal and the NBA declaring kind of timelines, they don't necessarily add up very well.

If you have a guy that's testing the waters and finds out that he has kind of a good draft prospect and he ends up leaving and there's really nobody you can replace him with, that's a tough balance. A lot of programs that are playing this deep in March have to deal with that.

And so when Walt and Will decided they were going to come back, it was kind of a sigh of relief for us because those guys are incredibly important and we're building around them moving forward.

But I think both of them made the right decision. I think both of them have done a lot for their personal draft prospects going into this year, their NBA prospects. Both of them are in a much better position this year than last time. I'm proud of them for the work they've put in and grateful for what they've done for our program.

**Q. Could you speak to the depth this team has? Obviously it was on display yesterday, and how many guys were able to have significant contribution.**

TODD GOLDEN: It's our biggest strength. We go nine deep. With Micah coming back, I have equated it to kind of getting a deadline trade deal done right before we were able to add some depth and physicality and size to your lineup in college, which obviously there's no trade deadline. But him coming back when he did was huge for us.

Our biggest strength is when we go to our bench, go to Tommy or Micah, there's simply not a big drop-off. They're great players, as Rueben and Condo are. And Zel, the level that he is playing at right now, especially yesterday I thought he was as good as anybody, the way he played in our backcourt. This time of year, having that depth is incredible.

**Q. To the point of roster construction, curious in this era with the portal, when you bring guys on campus to see if they're a fit, how much are you listening to your own players about if they want that guy in the locker room? How much say do the 18- to 22-year-olds get?**

TODD GOLDEN: A lot depending on who it is. If it's guys who have a lot of equity in our program we're definitely listening to what they have to say. With what we're trying to do at Florida, we're continuing to try to build a program in a time where it's really hard to do that with all the moving around and all the transfer legislation.

I do believe, though, at a place like Florida you can do that. I feel we are doing that. And when we brought in Alijah, last year to visit him, Walt and Will, they had a big say in regards to whether he was the right fit.

Obviously from a basketball standpoint, that's on us as a staff to figure out. But one of the most obvious things about our team is that our guys really enjoy being around each other. I think there's a lot of value in that.

I'm not sure exactly to measure how valuable, but it's definitely part of what makes us who we are.

Guys who have been in our program a number of years definitely have a say in regards to the guys that we bring

in. And obviously we're going to have the final say as a staff. If we feel there's not going to be a good synergy between the newcomers and the guys in our locker room, it's going to be really hard to make it work. And we're generally going to pass on those guys.

**Q. Six guys with double-digit scoring yesterday. How does that exemplify the identity of this team? And how has that identity evolved over the course of the season?**

TODD GOLDEN: Again, it speaks to our depth and our ability to take advantage of different match-ups and who has the hot hand. Again, last night I thought Denzel was a guy that really stepped up. And his minutes, he played 20 minutes, I think, last night.

And he was ultra aggressive. I thought he did a great job of kind of pushing pace, pushing tempo and taking and making the right shots.

And how it exemplifies us, we play hard. We play together. And our guys enjoy playing with each other. So we'll continue to pour into that and hope that it shows up tomorrow against Tech as well.

**Q. It all starts to blend together after a while. You've probably touched on this a little this year when we've talked to you, but was there a moment when you realized that this team could be special and maybe get into this position? And was there something that it had to do to get to this position?**

TODD GOLDEN: As a staff, we thought, going throughout the summer, that once we got this group together and got our six weeks with them in the summer, watching them play pickup and watching them work out together and just kind of seeing the level of toughness that Alijah brought to the program and Rueben brought to the program, Sam coming in and our talent level raised compared to where it was, and our intensity, our urgency, our competitiveness was definitely much better than it was last year.

At that point we obviously hadn't played against anybody else but we felt like this team has a chance. We obviously ran through the non-conference. Carolina was probably the only challenge we had being down late in that game. And we won that. All right. We're pretty gritty.

We looked at our team at the under-four media timeout of that game, we were down four, and I remember looking at Will, Walt and Alijah, and there was no stress in their eyes. They were, like, we're going to get this done; we'll find a way to win this game. And certainly they did.

In conference play, we lose our first game against Kentucky. I felt we played well offensively but we obviously gave up a lot of points. I'm, like, are we going to have an edge defensively?

When we beat Tennessee by 30 in the second game of the regular season when they were No. 1 in the country, I was, all right, this group has a real chance. And I would point to that game.

Obviously winning at Auburn was another one, with Alijah not playing in that game. We felt -- I was disappointed he wasn't able to play going into it. And our guys stepped up. Zel and Urbi played really well that day. And everybody in the front court played well. That was before Micah came back.

Going in there and winning that game, going on the road and winning at Bama, those are the type of wins that give you confidence as a coach that you could have a deep run. I would point to specific games as what led us build the confidence that we have right now.

**Q. I know no games in the NCAA Tournament are easy, but through the first three games, maybe this concept that you guys haven't played a complete game yet, is that fair? And do you feel like there's better basketball ahead maybe Saturday in terms of how you guys are playing right now?**

TODD GOLDEN: I don't know if -- we might not have played a complete game. What we did yesterday was pretty impressive, I would say. Maryland has been awesome. Awesome by the numbers. I don't think they've lost a game by more than five points before we played them all year.

So for us to be able to run away from them, get up by 18 in the second half I thought was pretty impressive.

Obviously our start against Norfolk State, we were up by 32 points 15 minutes into the game. I thought that was pretty dang good. We obviously didn't play a complete 40 that night.

Even though we weren't at our best against UConn, I thought our toughness in that game showed up. They played well. They played very well. They were healthy. Coach Hurley had obviously won the last two national championships. Their team was confident and comfortable. They're hard to guard on a short prep. They had control of that game in the second half a little bit.

And kind of the grittiness and toughness that we showed to stay the course and keep our composure and push through

gave us a lot of confidence going into this weekend. We felt we lifted the weight of the world off our shoulders getting through the first weekend. So coming into this weekend, we were a little looser, and we were too loose with the ball in the first half yesterday.

I thought we played more with more freedom in the second half. I thought we took off. So hopefully we can continue that tomorrow.

**Q. The balance the way you've been able to build out this roster over three years, is that a model you can repeat? And then also, if you're able to incorporate the five stars, supposed one-and-done freshmen, how will you do that?**

TODD GOLDEN: My hope is that we can continue to build our program this way. It's always going to be a challenge with NIL.

We haven't been very active at all right now for this year, trying to give our guys that have bought into our program that are with our team right now all the attention. And we'll worry about that when the season's over and we might miss on a couple of kids because of that. I've seen kids already committing, which is kind of crazy because there's teams still playing ball right now.

We'll continue to do it, trying to make sure we have a great nucleus in the program that we can return year after year, go out and find like-minded, tough competitive kids that want to be part of our program.

In regards to five stars and things like that, we're going to recruit guys that we feel are good fits for our program. If they're five stars that want to be a part of what we're doing, great. If not, we'll continue to find Tommy Haughs and Alex Condons and go get guys that compete their tails off and are really prideful about wearing the Florida jersey and do it that way and live with the results.

**Q. You talked about wanting to savor this moment and knowing how quickly it can end. When you look at the makeup of this team, who they are, what do you want people to know about the group that seems so special to you?**

TODD GOLDEN: I think people see it every day. They're a consistent group. They're mature. They have a lot of care for each other. They play incredibly hard and they play incredibly unselfish. It's unique nowadays in college because of all the movement to get a group that cares about each other the way that our guys do.

Speaking about roster construction, that was a big part of

our plan for this year, was we had Will, Walt, Zel Tommy and Condo coming back, and we wanted to keep, build around those guys, make sure we added the right pieces.

That roster continuity was huge for us. Because when Alijah, Sam, Rueben came in, specifically, and Zey and Urbi as freshmen, they come in and see these guys get along really well, see them being unselfish, hanging out, it's easy to become a part of that.

The unselfishness is what I keep going back to that I take a lot of pride in and I know our guys take pride in.

Hopefully we can continue to build that on a year-to-year basis. It's obviously not easy, and I'm not naive to think that we don't have a special group this year. I know we do. But we'll continue to work and make sure we try to replicate that moving forward.

**Q. I want to go back to last night's game and ask you how important was it to have (indiscernible) in the rotation in the second half? And is there any concerns moving forward, or do you think he's kind of fully ready?**

TODD GOLDEN: I mean, he gave us great minutes in the second half. Him not playing after, I think, the first five minutes of the first half, it kind of threw off our rotation. We had to keep Tommy out there. Micah got in quick foul trouble.

We weren't able to really impose our will the way we wanted to. Him coming back, giving us ten minutes, whatever it was in the second half, was huge. Made that great block that led to an ice bucket where Zel put it in to put us up 16.

I thought the play that we referenced earlier when eh dove on the loose ball, got it up to Micah for that tip-in, was a back-breaking type play.

We're strength in numbers, similar to the Warriors used to say back in the day, strength in numbers. That's our team as well. And having those four bigs out there playing consistent minutes is really important to us.

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