

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

Saturday, March 29, 2025
San Francisco, California, USA
Chase Center

Florida Gators

Coach Todd Golden

Walter Clayton Jr.

Thomas Haugh

Elite Eight Postgame Media Conference



Florida - 84, Texas Tech - 79

TODD GOLDEN: First, I want to give a lot of credit to Texas Tech. I thought they played a great game today. Controlled different facets of the game that we usually do. They had our backs against the wall. I think we were down 10. Under the four-minute media.

But credit to our players and our staff. I thought we did a great job staying the course, not getting too high or too low or trying to make hero defensive plays down the stretch. We executed our fouls. These two guys next to me made some big-time shots.

At the end of the day, great teams are as good as their players lead them. Walter has done a great job all year that way. And Tommy played his tail off for us across every game this season.

And I'm really proud of these guys for the way they stepped up and made two big 3s each down the stretch. I think we finished the game on a 17-4 run. That allowed us to win. Would not have happened without these guys next to me.

Q. Walter, what was kind of going through your mind as they get the alley-oop slam to go up 10? What was talked about in that moment to get you guys to go on that run?

WALTER CLAYTON JR.: Just staying together. We all kept telling each other to stay together, stay the course. There's a lot of time left on the clock. Keep on playing to the final buzzer. Don't break during adversity.

Q. Walt, we asked you the other day about what it was like to be compared to Steph Curry. You did a pretty good impression of him tonight. Wondered before you hit the shot that tied it, because then the next 3 you hit that gave you guys the lead, was probably the biggest shot you've ever hit, the one before it was the biggest shot. What was the biggest shot coming into this game that you had ever hit?

WALTER CLAYTON JR.: I don't know. If you ask everybody, it was probably the one versus UConn. But, no, I honestly can't even remember right now. I'd probably say the UConn one.

Q. Tommy, you guys held them to two points I think in the final three minutes. What flipped the switch defensively, you think, kind of late in the game because they were getting a lot, particularly a lot down low earlier in the game?

THOMAS HAUGH: I think I did a pretty bad job of limiting some of their bigs to tendencies. What's his name, No. 5 kept getting to his right hand.

I think at the end of the last couple minutes we locked in on a scout and just trusted it. And it worked off. That's a credit to the coaches and also the players just for executing that.

Q. Just how exciting is it to be going to the Final Four and doing it in this manner with such -- I mean, really a comeback for the ages?

THOMAS HAUGH: It's crazy. I feel like I'm dreaming. I was watching the round of 64 in the eighth grade sneaking my phone into science class watching it. Now to say I'm playing in the Final Four is wild. It's wild.

WALTER CLAYTON JR.: Just an amazing feeling. I said it multiple times; we've just got a group of guys that love each other. Just doing this together, seeing each other's success, it means a lot.

Q. Walter, take me through the emotions as you're hitting those 3s? You and Thomas have got the run going, turning the tide. What are you feeling, what's going through your mind? And what are you seeing in

the opponent as to how that is demoralizing them?

WALTER CLAYTON JR.: For sure. I definitely seen them, a couple shots went in, they kind of turned around looked at their bench, like, how.

Nothing was going through my mind. My mind was blank. Thankful that the shots went in. But we were locked in until the final buzzer sounded. My mind was blank, honestly.

Q. What is it about you guys? I mean, there was the South Carolina game, you're dead in the water. The Arkansas game, you're dead in the water. We've had games like this all year. Is there just this undying belief that it's never over until "we" decide it's over?

WALTER CLAYTON JR.: For sure, it's definitely like you said undying belief. But it goes to show how together we all are. Many times could easily just break, start pointing the finger, blaming each other for this and that. But we just stayed together through the end and stayed the course. And thankfully we got it done today.

THOMAS HAUGH: You've got guards like these guys, the game's never over with them, and Denzel, too. It's just wild.

Q. Walter, you're First-Team All-American, you get so much attention. You hit big shots and you deserve all that. But you guys weren't playing great and maybe the only reason you're in the game late is because of the guy to your left. How do you describe what he's meant to the team today and what he's meant to the team all season?

WALTER CLAYTON JR.: He's meant everything. You know what I'm saying? I've said it multiple times, I think multiple guys don't get enough recognition. Tommy is definitely one of them. He comes in every day, puts his head down and works.

There's a lot more to his game, but he's sacrificing for the team. He plays his role and does everything we need him to do. I'm thankful for him and I love him and let's get two more, my boy.

Q. Do you think that the Steph comparisons are now accurate? Now are you comfortable with that?

WALTER CLAYTON JR.: I mean, I don't know. That's arguably the greatest point guard in the history of basketball. I've got a ways to go. I wouldn't quite compare myself yet. But just thankful for the recognition.

THOMAS HAUGH: I think he is. (Laughter) I don't know,

man, yeah, like he said, he's the greatest point guard of all time.

Q. Talk a little bit about that never-say-die, Gator mentality, you're sticking around, you won't give up and you're winning.

WALTER CLAYTON JR.: For sure. I think like I said, guys could just break apart during those moments. We all stayed the course, stayed together. And I think that just goes to show the togetherness of the team, the love we have for each other to get through those tough times, because we went through tough times during the summer, through practice, stuff like that. But stay the course, like you said the Gator mentality.

Q. You punched a ticket to the Final Four. I know it's still fresh, but what's the thought process as you go to San Antonio and look to get two more?

WALTER CLAYTON JR.: For sure. Definitely going to enjoy tonight. Definitely going to enjoy tonight, possibly tomorrow. We don't know yet. Then we'll see who we're going to play, watching the games, focus on the next one. We understand it's not over yet.

Q. When you're down late, you give a couple of fouls for one-on-ones and they miss. What's the thought process doing that that early, and how important was that in fueling the comeback?

TODD GOLDEN: They do a good job milking the game when they have a lead. Obviously and Toppin are very good individual one-on-one players. It felt like from the eight-minute mark to the four-minute mark they were getting them in iso situations, and we don't double on the post a lot, so they're getting a late clock and putting the ball in.

We felt like being down nine or 10, whatever it was, at the under-four, we had to find a way to get a few more possessions in the ball game and try to stretch it out a little bit. And being in the one-on-one we thought that was an opportunistic time to foul their front court, given the opportunity.

Toppin was the guy we wanted to foul. And Williams was a second option. And fortunately they missed two front ends. Those were big-time plays that flipped the game a little bit, allowed Tommy to hit a second 3 to cut it to three. I think they missed the next one as well, and Walter came down hit a big-time shot.

They came down, got a bucket, and Walter hit another 3.

It was a calculated decision we had to make at that point where we needed to get more possessions in the game and it worked out well for us.

Q. I know you've watched Walt do a lot of crazy and impressive things over the season, but are you ever surprised or were you just waiting for him to take the game over?

TODD GOLDEN: You know, he's obviously a blessing to have in our program, have on our team. He's an incredible player, but outside of that he's a great leader. He's been everything we could have asked him to be for this program since he got to campus two years ago.

Obviously this year he's taken on a lot more ball-handling responsibilities for us. He's closed out a lot of games for us.

And there's not another player in America you would rather have right now than Walter Clayton with the ball in his hands in a big-time moment. As he said, I think he said he blacked out or whatever, he doesn't get too high or too low. He does a great job controlling his emotions.

And most players in that moment, their heart rate would get up. He has that special talent and ability to stay even keeled.

The biggest thing in those moments is you need to have somebody that wants to take those shots. They're obviously difficult plays, but someone that has the confidence to step up and make incredible individual plays. And Walter did that for us tonight.

Q. I know you've talked a lot about Kyle Smith and Randy Bennett the last couple of days. I'm going to ask you again, specifically what's one thing, either Xs and Os or interpersonal, you got from Randy that you've taken to heart, and one thing, Xs and Os or interpersonal, that you got from Kyle that you take to heart?

TODD GOLDEN: First with Coach Bennett, I kind of thought about this after the game. At the under-four, he's always so good about staying the course and trusting his program, trusting what he does.

That was the moment that we were in at the under-four, when we were down nine or 10. It was, hey, we can't panic, can't try to make hero plays. Texas Tech is too good to try to do that. They're going to beat you if you try to kind of get outside of your comfort zone and do something that isn't within the team.

So albeit down 10 we did everything we could to stay consistent. Obviously we pressed. We fouled a little bit. But we executed really, really well. And that's something that I think Coach Bennett's teams always do.

For Coach Smith, I'm just most grateful for the opportunity that he provided me back at Saint Mary's. He recruited me as the associate head coach or head assistant. Just the accountability that he always held me to, the standard he always held me to as a player -- I walked on at first and then earned a scholarship. But they never let me off the hook.

They always treated me like I needed to always be perfect. And at the time I would get frustrated with their intense coaching and Coach Smith's intense coaching.

But looking back on it, I'm just grateful for the belief he had in me and the opportunity he provided me at Saint Mary's. And being able to play for those guys and go to two NCAA Tournaments was kind of the backbone of my coaching career now.

Q. Tommy played starters minutes but you use him in that role coming off the bench. What about his skill set, his game, is well-suited for that role, especially tonight?

TODD GOLDEN: He's great in any role. He could easily start for us. He did start for us quite a bit when Condo was out.

And Tommy has just continued to improve so much when he got to campus. He was good for us last year, helped us win a lot of games. But I think he only averaged, like, three points and four rebounds a game.

But his jump he's made from his freshman to sophomore year has been incredible. Just his ability to shoot the basketball. He's becoming an elite 3-point shooter, elite free-throw shooter.

Areas that he struggled with a little bit last year, he's so good with the ball. He's a great pressure release for our guys, catching the ball in middle of the floor, Condo as well, but both guys are great that way. And his defensive versatility is huge for us.

The thing about Tommy, and it goes for other guys on our roster as well, he's a winning player. He just finds ways to impact the game and to help the team win the most -- one of if not the most unselfish guys out there, just being comfortable coming off the bench when he could be starting for pretty much any team in America. Obviously he'll start for us next year.

But he's just a fantastic player. He's a great person. Comes from a great family. He was just brought up the right way. And he's super, super unselfish. He's grateful to be at Florida. Obviously myself and my coaching staff are grateful that he's a part of our program.

Q. You guys started out 5-of-19 from 3. Did you sense the 3s would come late? And what was your demeanor on the bench maybe encouraging guys to get stops and shots in that final four minutes?

TODD GOLDEN: I was discouraged for a while because I was looking down at the stat sheet after the medias in the second half, and really the only glaring defense was their success shooting the ball. They were shooting the ball at about 45 percent. I think they were 9-for-20 at one point, so they must have went 1-for-7 on the last few.

That was the difference in the game for a while. Everything else was pretty consistent. We rebounded about the same rate. We got great free throws, did a great job knocking those down. We lived at the line, which was huge.

Turned it over a little more than they did, but a lot of that stuff was back and forth.

The 3-point shooting was the difference for a while. But down the stretch obviously I think we made our last four and we needed every single one of them. And they were huge for us.

Q. Darrion Williams, who has got to be more than 225 pounds, by the way, what kind of problem did he pose? And did you ever feel, not a sense of hopelessness, but just getting frustrated how he was just kind of just pounding it in there?

TODD GOLDEN: Honestly, I thought we did a great job on both of those guys for the majority of the game, not all the game. The last 10 minutes they started wearing us down and putting us in the basket a little bit.

But over the first 30 minutes our issue was not guarding him in the post. Toppin finished 9-for-22 and Darrion 9-for-18. Not crazy efficient but they were getting us down the stretch.

And that was a little bit, we were talking about all right should we start blitzing these guys, doubling them a little bit? Darrion is a great player, a great passer. That was a concern to me. I didn't want to run bodies at him because he's very good at making the right play.

I thought giving up 3s at that point would be daggers for us. We stayed the course. I thought we did a good job late of squeezing him in the paint. When it got tight we ran bodies on him and he couldn't see out. That worked for us.

But we talk about staying the course. They were 2s. They're 2s, they weren't 3s. And we were able to get enough stops down the stretch.

Q. Just what's it mean to you this moment, getting to go to the Final Four? It's got to be surreal as you like to say sometimes?

TODD GOLDEN: It's incredible. It's absolutely incredible. It's a direct result of the work that our players have done all year and the work my staff has done. They've all, to a man, been incredibly consistent, unselfish and worked their tail off. We don't do this without the collective work of our program.

But I'm incredibly proud to be able to be here in year three. And to get Florida back to the Final Four is something that's incredibly special.

When I was fortunate enough to get this position three years ago, I'm not sure this was something that, A, get to the Final Four by year three. But we're awfully proud of it.

Q. You talked several times before about being in the huddle and looking at guys in the eyes and talking about what you see. Okay, you're down three. Are you seeing, okay, we got this? Are you seeing -- what are you seeing in their eyes at that point in time?

TODD GOLDEN: The under-four media was the one that sticks out. We were down nine or 10, whatever it was. The message was we've got to make every winning play down the stretch.

Again, our guys, our three seniors -- Tommy, Condo, Rube had some good defensive possessions there, too. I didn't feel like we were without hope. I felt like our guys still felt we had a shot but understood that we didn't have that much time. And we had to pick it up and make sure we got every block-out and make sure we got every 50/50 ball and obviously step up and make big shots. But that's the benefit of having great senior leadership in the backcourt.

Mart, two Final Fours with two different programs. That speaks volumes of him as a winner. Will Richard is a great winner, leader and great communicator. And obviously Walter has led us by example all year.

So in those moments, even though you're down nine, you feel about as good as you can being in that situation. And

incredibly proud of the way our guys stepped up and found a way to win this game.

Q. Chance McMillian didn't play the last four games. Was there anything you guys did preparation-wise, although you can't prepare for is he going to play or not going to play, but in the day leading up to it, preparing for his impact on the floor?

TODD GOLDEN: He was in the scouting report. Obviously he's great player. I actually recruited Chance when I was the head coach at USF. Known him a long time.

We were disappointed when they said he was playing because he hadn't been playing. We knew that he was going to be hard to guard and he's a great shooter, great scorer. Gives Texas Tech more depth. That was an area we felt would be a benefit to us.

But he still had a great game. He was 5-for-11. I thought he hit big shots in moments in this game. But, yeah, he did a good job tonight.

Q. Couple times this season you referenced, I believe -- I think it was after Kentucky, maybe even Auburn, maybe -- well, Walt was the college version of Steph Curry. I'll bite and throw this at you in this building. What do you think about that now?

TODD GOLDEN: I mean, I thought Walt had a great answer. I think in his mind, like everything that Steph has been able to do in his career leading this organization to multiple NBA championships, to being the best shooter of all time, one of the best winners of all time in the NBA, that's kind of a lot to put on a young man.

But I'd say the one thing where Walt 100 percent is similar to Steph is their incredible shot-making and their ability to get it off whenever they want, have the IQ and intelligence to get separation and tend to be unflappable with a hand in his face.

Just like the Warriors want Steph to be able to find a way to get open, get shots in those moments, we want Walt taking those shots for us down the stretch. There's a reason why he was AP First-Team All-American. He's, in my humble estimation, the best guard in America.

Q. I happened to be out there when Kevin hung up a Facetime with the Columbia AD. They're going to give him another week with you guys.

TODD GOLDEN: Yes, they are.

Q. But how much does it mean to you? He's 36. You were a head coach a little younger than that. But what does it mean to you to see him kind of go full circle to Columbia and also have this run with you guys before he departs?

TODD GOLDEN: He's an amazing man. We've shared a lot of times together in our coaching career. I've worked with him I think every year but three of my coaching career. He's made me a much better coach. He's always run my offense. But he's like having another head coach in the program. Just incredibly bright, just super mature, great leader, super consistent.

He deserves this opportunity. For us -- not just myself, but Carlin and the rest of our staff -- we're incredibly happy for him. I know Kyle is really proud of him.

I'm just glad that Peter Pilling, the AD at Columbia, made the right choice and gave this opportunity to Kevin. They're really fortunate to have him, and he's fortunate for the opportunity. And he's going to do a great job. There's no doubt in my mind about that.

I'm going to miss him. But I think the sign of having success is when guys work with you or they play for you and as they move on, their opportunities continue to get better. When they spend time with you -- and there's no doubt when Huff came down to Gainesville three years ago that this was a goal of his to become a head coach and have the opportunity to run his own program. I'm just really happy for him that he was able to do it out of our program.

I'm the branch off Kyle, and Huffte is off mine. I've got Huffte, Andrzejek, and I take credit for Chris Gerlufsen.

Q. You have a rotation that's eight men deep, and you talked about Tommy might be starting for just any program in America other than Florida. What's that kind of depth allow you to do in a game like this where some combinations, lineups are getting stifled, and how does that allow Florida to win games like this?

TODD GOLDEN: Our depth is why we win games like this because there's going to be nights where certain players don't have their best and you need other guys to step up. We kept it at eight tonight. I wanted to play Urb but felt like we wanted to keep it tight early.

I thought Zel gave us good minutes. Again, you need to have depth and need to have multiple guys that can step up when other guys aren't playing their best.

That's why we've been good all year and consistent, why we haven't lost two in a row. We haven't got in any

droughts or situations where nobody's stepping up. And obviously it was Tommy's night tonight to do that. I thought Micah gave us great minutes off the bench, went 3-for-3, had that big tip-in, and obviously Walter stepped up down the stretch as well.

Q. How long do they get to celebrate? They seemed they were looking to you for guidance. Wondered if you'd share with us.

TODD GOLDEN: We'll have a night tonight to kind of soak this up and take it in. Then we're going to fly back to Gainesville tomorrow morning. We'll get back probably right in time to watch Auburn play, right around 5:00. We'll get back together on Monday and start preparing for whoever wins that game. But we're going to enjoy it tonight, for sure. If you don't enjoy the victories, this is a tough profession to be in. So we will enjoy it. Incredibly proud of our program and excited to head to San Antonio this week.

They won't be doing anything tomorrow night, I can promise you that.

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