

Southeastern Conference Men's Basketball TipOff Media Days

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Birmingham, Alabama, USA

Florida Gators

Todd Golden

Men's Media Day Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We are ready to begin with Coach Golden. We'll go straight to questions.

Q. I read somewhere reputable you guys signed a great transfer class. I was wondering if you could go over those guys and how good you feel about the guys you have in the portal?

TODD GOLDEN: I think we did. Part of it was we signed a lot of them. We have five transfers coming in.

We knew we needed to replace a lot of production as Colin left our program. I feel like we did a really good job of getting a good balance in the front court and backcourt, starting with Tyrese Samuel. Averaged double figures, did a really good job at Seton Hall last year, coming down to play his fifth year with us.

A really talented young one in Micah Handlogten, who will be a sophomore for us, was at Marshall, Sun Belt Freshman of the Year last year. Really, really good shot-blocker, rebounder, a great presence at the rim.

In the backcourt, Zyon Pullin, a fifth-year transfer from UC Riverside. I think he averaged like 18 points, five assists, five rebounds, something along those lines, last year on the West Coast.

Walter Clayton from Iona, I think he'll be one of the best shooters in the league, three level scorer for us, averaged close to 18 a game last year as well.

Julian Rishwain was a fifth-year we brought from San Francisco, my old job, a guy that can stretch the floor for us.

Those guys can help us in different ways. To get guys that have performed and been efficient and done well at their previous stops will really help us this coming year.

Q. When you were here before, how would you compare the league from then to now? How good do you think the SEC is in hoops now? Obviously everything is football first.

TODD GOLDEN: I mean, this league is way better than it was when I was here as an assistant. But you look back at when I first got to Auburn, I think it was 2016, the league was trying to find ways to get basketball at the same level that football was, whether it was creative scheduling, there were a lot of different initiatives they were taking on.

When you look at it, I really think the coaches hired during that stretch were a huge reason the league is at the level it is now. You can argue it's the best league in America.

As you said, you said five or six teams getting in the top 25, four other teams getting votes, that's more than half the league that some people consider to be top 25. When you put that together, it's going to be really tough.

Q. We've seen an emergence of international prospects coming to the college ranks the last couple years. You have multiple international players on your roster. What do you think has led to that transition, them being more interested in college opportunities? What has made you as coaches in adding them to your rosters?

TODD GOLDEN: I think they're more interested simply because they've seen guys come before them and have success. It's been going on for a while. Now you see more and more guys coming over and having really good careers that lead them for the opportunity to play in the NBA. I think that's number one.

As coaches, we see guys when we go recruit internationally that are really ready to go. They've kind of come up through clubs or different organizations where transparently they get to train more than our young men and women do.

These international prospects that are coming over generally don't have a lot of baggage with them, they're

coming over to play basketball, go to class, do the best they can to prepare themselves to become pros. You have guys that are really focused and have a great understanding of why they're coming over.

I think when you put those things together, it explains a lot. International players have done really well in our programs. We obviously added a couple more this year. It's a space that we'll continue to recruit really hard as long as we're at Florida.

Q. There's been almost like a 25% drop in number of freshmen in Power Five conference level the last four or five years. Is that almost a negative side effect with the extra COVID year, transfer portal? Does that make it hard for high school prospects?

TODD GOLDEN: Yeah, absolutely. You hit it on the head. It's funny because someone driving us over here in the car asked a similar question.

The two things that clearly have led to left freshmen being in the mix, number one, the COVID year. It's just math. Every year that played in that season got an extra year of eligibility. A fifth class in there jumbling it up.

Every student-athlete can take advantage of the one-time transfer exception. You have freshmen coming in, especially at our level, most of the freshmen that are recruited have a lot of options. They're highly decorated players, guys that have been on different campuses and have been wined and dined in terms of being recruited to the different institutions.

When they get there and it doesn't necessarily work out the way they want it to in year one, it's easier for them to leave. When you have that potential in the equation, it makes it even more difficult to invest in young freshmen bringing them on campus.

It's something that I think will continue to turn as these COVID players graduate, then everything kind of evens out. I think it might sway back to more freshmen being recruited and involved in these programs.

It's tricky because there are a lot of talented freshmen out there that deserve these opportunities, are loyal and will be in your program. We as coaches and staff members have to do a really good job figuring out which ones are the right ones to bring in.

Q. When you talk about being wined and dined, things not going guys' way and quickly transferring, how much more now is player retention and the all-year-long attention to that on a staff? How much

more important is that now?

TODD GOLDEN: I think it's really, really important. I think the key to that also is you have to get your program to a spot where you want to retain everybody and make sure that those guys are on board with what you're doing.

I like at our program going from last year to this year, we did not have a lot of retention. We highlighted and found a lot of great guys that were fits in our program and to take the next step.

After this coming season, from years two to three, I think retention will be a key part of our program. We have nine guys potentially that have the ability to come back. We want all nine of them back, and we want to build with that group. And I think that will be an opportunity for us to take another step up.

Once you get your program healthy and once you get it right, I think retention is a great way to separate yourself and give yourself a competitive advantage against your peers.

Q. Talk about what you feel like you learned in your first year coaching the Gators going into year two. Also, what is it like to coach against some of the most outstanding coaches that are recognized across the country?

TODD GOLDEN: Yeah, obviously year one, a great experience. We didn't finish the way we wanted to, but we had some really good moments. I thought towards the middle of conference play we kind of figured ourselves out. We were 6-3, playing really good. Colin goes down. We just didn't have enough behind him to weather that storm.

But I wouldn't say there was a lot of new things that I learned, but a lot of my thoughts were affirmed based on my time with Bruce at Auburn. It's one of if not the best league in America. Every night you're going up against NBA players on the other side. If you don't put your best foot forward, if you're not competitive, physical, ready to go, you're going to get popped.

It's always good to remember that. Then coaching against these guys as a coach, a young coach, this is something you aspire to do. You aspire to coach against Rick Barnes, against John Calipari, these different guys that have a lot of success over their career.

Obviously there's a bunch more great coaches. Those are just two that I named.

Being in that arena with these guys, it's an honor and



something that I look forward to competing against every night.

Q. You mentioned coaches, Chris Beard is a big-name guy coming into the league. Do you know Chris? What do you think his impact will be in the league? Also, Eric Musselman is a San Francisco guy. Do you know Eric? If so, the impact he's had at Arkansas.

TODD GOLDEN: I don't know Chris personally, but obviously he's a coach that's had a lot of success in his career. Just like every other great coach, he's just going to continue to raise the level of our league with what he will do at Ole Miss.

Muss is someone I've known for a long time. I had an opportunity to go work a must in the G League 2010 when he was coach of the Reno Bighorns. He played at San Francisco for Randy Bennett and Kyle Smith, guys that coached me at St. Mary's.

We do go way back to when I was 20, 21 years old. Actually, Muss was a guy that when I graduated from St. Mary's and decided am I going to go try to play professionally or get into coaching, I asked Muss what I should do. He said, You definitely should go play. I went and played overseas.

It's kind of funny how small of a world basketball is, how everything comes full circle. We competed against him at Reno. Now fast forward five years, head coach at Arkansas, done a wonderful job there. I'm at Florida competing against him on a yearly basis, so it's neat.

Q. (No microphone.)

TODD GOLDEN: None that I'm necessarily ready to share right now (smiling).

Q. We're seeing through the transfer portal a lot of mid-major stars coming to the SEC level. What do you see from those guys that you're bringing into your program that will translate when you have to rely on them to be that star at a higher level of competition?

TODD GOLDEN: Yeah, obviously a lot of it's analytically driven, guys that have had a lot of success, whether it be low or mid-major level. You look at a couple different things, their efficiency, usage, how many possessions do they use, how do they fare against tier A and B competition.

I think that's something that's important to look at to see if their numbers are -- they do really, really well against the low-major teams but they don't have as much success

when they get the opportunity to compete against better teams.

Like everything else, you can't say certain they're going to do really well or not do well, but you want to give yourself the best chance to figure it out.

We're diving into a lot of data that way, watching film, just trying to sort it out that way.

Q. Eric obviously had a pro background for so many years. Makes a transition to college. Knowing him the way you do, what do you think made him a successful transition guy from the NBA to college? He thinks he may be the only guy who was an NBA head coach who went to become a college assistant. Humbled himself. What do you think about that aspect? He was the transfer portal before it was cool.

TODD GOLDEN: You hit it a little bit right there. I think Muss, his experience across the NBA and the CBA, going back to his early days professionally, because he did take kind of that mentality to college. Going to Reno, his first Division I job, he did kind of create the new wave of the transfer portal. You look at the Martin twins when they first got to Reno, Jordan Caroline, they had a really strong team.

A big part of it was the way he built his roster. That was really unique across college basketball at that time. Now it's really prevalent where teams are building their roster out of the portal.

That pro experience, bringing in a new way to think about college rosters to college basketball, was something that kind of gave him a head start and made him unique and gave him an opportunity to be really good really fast at Nevada Reno. I think he's done a very similar thing at Arkansas, as well.

Q. (No microphone.)

TODD GOLDEN: Yeah, I mean, I think it says a lot about him, that he was willing to do it. I think he was also smart and knew if he did it for a year or two he would get a head job in college, as well.

Yeah, I think it does say a lot of about his personality that he's willing to do that.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, thank you.

TODD GOLDEN: All right. Thank you.

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