

FLORIDA QUOTES

An interview with:

FLORIDA GATORS

THE MODERATOR: We'll go ahead and ask Coach Donovan to make his opening statement.

COACH BILLY DONOVAN: Well, with a short turnaround from the George Mason game, you know, I think it was pretty well-documented about how good defensively UCLA was. I think our basketball team's pretty good defensively as well.

I thought tonight was going to be about offense. What I mean by that is I thought who could attack each other's defense better was going to have a better chance, in my opinion, of winning the game.

They have a lot of different things that they run. They're a very, very difficult team to guard because they run Farmar and Afflalo off so many staggers. But they're a real big rotation team, a real big help team. We just talked about coming into the game offensively spacing 'em, trying to create some middle pick-and-roll help situations, try to what we call attack the alley, which is the lane on dribble penetration because they really do such a great job helping, then make the extra pass.

I thought Taurean, you know, did a great job today running our team. He made great decisions. He put a lot of pressure on their defense in the middle of the floor.

Lee I thought did a very, very good job on Farmar. Corey Brewer did a nice job on Afflalo. Those guys are good players. It's tough keeping them down the entire game. Second half, both those two guys kind of exploded a little bit. But we just tried to continually attack and mixed up our defenses. We pressed some. We played a couple possessions of zone, we played man, tried to run and jump just to try to keep them off balance.

These guys did a good job. I told them before the game that this game was going to be coming down to everything that we talk about being. It's going to come down to unselfishness, teamwork, extra pass, high assist total, and then being able to defend and rebound.

They did a great job. I'm happy for them. I'm happy for the University of Florida and all the people that could share in it. I just want to say that, you know, congratulations to UCLA. I think watching them on film, they're a great basketball team. We beat a very good team. They're great defensively. Got great respect for their tradition, what their program represents.

But I'm also happy for these kids up here because it hasn't been just this game; it's been all year long going all the way back to the middle of November when we had to play in Madison Square Garden. They've stayed focused and have worked and haven't embraced anything the whole entire year. It's been a unique and special group of kids to coach.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for the student-athletes.

Q. Joakim, can you talk about what it felt like to be laying on the floor with some of your teammates on you and the confetti falling down?

JOAKIM NOAH: It's undescrivable. This is the best I've ever felt in my life. You work so hard for these moments. They're so worth it. We worked so hard as a team. So many sweat (sic), tears, sacrifices to get to moments like this.

I'm just so proud of my teammates, my coach, my family being here. It's just -- you're like in a cloud. Not only does it feel good, it smells good, it tastes good. I just can't even describe it.

Q. Further question for the most valuable player. When you ran up into the stands, you were hugging people, who were you hugging and what were you thinking then?

JOAKIM NOAH: Well, I was just trying to get to my family. There's no feeling like winning in front of your family.

Like I said, I'm just -- I don't even -- I don't even know what to say right now. It's just -- you're in a state of shock. And, uhm, I'm just so proud of my teammates right now. It's crazy how much -- how hard we worked for this moment.

Q. Joakim, how soon in the game did you notice the UCLA players when they penetrated looking at you before they started looking at the basket?

JOAKIM NOAH: Pretty early in the game. But I don't think -- it's not about that. It was definitely a team effort. Okay, maybe I got a lot of the blocks this game. But I think when you look at what Corey Brewer did, Humpty Dump, you guys look at him as a three-point shooter. But, hey, he was a monster on D tonight. I think it was just a team effort. I mean, my man Horfy blocked a lot of shots, too. Even sometimes when we don't get blocks, we're just intimidating because we're trees out there.

Like I said, at the end of the day it's not about who's blocking shots and who is getting the stats, it's about getting W's and winning the game.

Q. Joakim, could you reflect on what this year and this tournament have been like for you to go from a guy coming off the bench last year to Final Four MVP, setting a record for blocked shots in the tournament.
JOAKIM NOAH: Well, it definitely was -- it was definitely a lot of hard work. It was definitely a different experience for the simple fact that we won the whole thing (smiling). Like I said before, the Gator boys are hot right now. It's just a great feeling, and I can't wait to get back to Gainesville. And, coach, don't get mad at us because we are going to do it very, very, very big when we come back.

Q. Taurean, throughout the tournament, we've heard you and your teammates say that you felt like for a lot of this season nobody really thought that you guys were capable of being national champions. What were some of the things that made you feel that way?

TAUREAN GREEN: We felt like that since the beginning of the year. We didn't get any respect. You know, the whole team just had the mindset of, okay, we know what we have to do, and we have to prove something to everybody coming out every game. I think just the mindset of our team caused us to play the way we played.

Q. Why no respect? What makes you say you got no respect?

TAUREAN GREEN: Well, you guys had us going to the NIT. We were ranked -- we don't really care about rankings. We were ranked 75th in the whole country. All the talk was about Anthony, Matt and David leaving. You know, those are three great players, but we still have a bunch of good players that returned. We just wanted to prove to everybody that we can play.

JOAKIM NOAH: Another reason is because you guys weren't there. We only had like four or five reporters at our games sometimes at the end of the game. I didn't see you there at the beginning of the season.

Q. I work in New York.

JOAKIM NOAH: Well, I see you here now.

Q. Those two threes in the beginning of the second half, were they designed for you? Did you feel that breeze tonight? Comment about how well you shot here this week.

LEE HUMPHREY: The two threes coming out at the start of the halftime, one was in transition. Taurean did a good job and found me open. The second one was a pass from Joe. We worked inside out. That's one of the best ways to get good looks from three is when you work the ball inside out.

What was the last part of the question?

Q. How well you shot this weekend, the breeze.

LEE HUMPHREY: I didn't actually feel the breeze today (laughter). I don't think the breeze was ever strong enough to affect the shot. Actually, it felt kind of good when you were hot. Not hot shooting, just hot in general. I felt good shooting the ball this weekend, though (laughter).

Q. Joakim, were you aware that you racing into the stands to hug your family, that you repeated the exact same thing your father did 23 years ago when he won the French Open.

JOAKIM NOAH: No, that's -- my father didn't do that. Actually, my grandfather, he ran onto the court. He jumped from the stands. I don't know how he did it 'cause you should have seen how high the jump was. He could have really hurt himself.

No, I mean, it doesn't matter. It's not something that you think about before the game. It's just sheer love and just the people -- when you win, you want to see the people that you love. That's where they were. So whatever it takes to see the people that you love. Has nothing to do with, "Oh, my father did it 23 years ago, so now I'm trying to do the same thing."

Q. Adrian Moss was huge for you in the first half. Can you talk about what you meant tonight, what he's meant to you all year.

JOAKIM NOAH: Boss player.

LEE HUMPHREY: He was big for us tonight. He came in with great energy. He's really a leader of our team. He's been around for five years. He knows how to prepare for games. He knows the right mindset to have. He stays really focused in every game. He came in tonight and he gave us great energy off the bench. He pulled down some big rebounds, knocked down a nice jumper. I thought his second jumper was in. It looked really good from my angle. He played really well for us tonight.

JOAKIM NOAH: Another thing about Adrian Moss, it's unbelievable how much he had to sacrifice this year. He deserves all the credit. Just winning this game, we play for him. He's our only senior. I just have so much respect for him as a person. I'm just so proud that he's my boy. Boss man. He's the leader of this team. I'm just proud to be his teammate.

Not a lot of people can say that they finished their basketball careers with a win. I'm just happy and proud to be his teammate.

Q. Joakim, second half you were inbounding the ball right there by the UCLA cheerleaders and dance team. I noticed you winked and grinned at one of them. Do you remember that?

JOAKIM NOAH: Yes (smiling).

No, actually they were talking a lot of trash. I mean, it was crazy. Like, okay, fans. But, I mean, what are those big things? I don't know what they're called.

They were just talking crazy to me, like, "You're so ugly." I mean, it hurts when you have so many beautiful girls out there just telling you how ugly you are and stuff. I just had to focus on the game.

I mean, when somebody is screaming all that stuff at you, you know, the best thing I could do was just blow a kiss by, and maybe they like me.

Q. Could you give us your feelings about winning that national championship, what it means to you.

TAUREAN GREEN: It's great. Like Joe said, you really can't describe it. Growing up, when you're a little kid, wanting to play college basketball, you dream of this moment. It really hasn't totally hit me yet. But, I mean, I'm excited as well as our teammates. I just really can't describe it right now.

LEE HUMPHREY: I think Taurean mentioned that when you're young, you're a basketball player, you always watch the NCAA tournament. I always remember watching One Shining Moment, the Final Four. You do want to play in the Final Four. It is kind of a like a dream come true. It's tough to describe. I don't know if it's really hit me yet either.

Q. Obviously you would be happy to beat anyone, but you beat the school that has the most championships. Symbolically, you beat one of the storied programs in college basketball. Could you talk about what it means to win your first title against UCLA.

TAUREAN GREEN: We heard about their history, how they won 11 national championships. Like we said before the game, I don't really think that really mattered coming into the game today. But, I mean, this win is just great for the University of Florida because now we're creating our own success. You know, we're trying to make the University of Florida a basketball power.

LEE HUMPHREY: I think it feels good just to win a national championship no matter who you play. I didn't really think about beating UCLA, that they were -- I knew they had a lot of championships, but it never entered my mind that that would be a team I wanted to beat to win a national championship. It's just the way it worked out.

We were just happy to get a win in the national championship game.

JOAKIM NOAH: Like Lee said it, it's sweet regardless. I think you answered the question -- the reporter answered the question better than anybody. At the end of the day, it's about winning it. I mean, it doesn't matter how many championships UCLA has. It would have tasted -- it would have been just as sweet if it was against anybody.

Q. Right before the TV interview, you hugged your coach, almost shook him pretty hard there. I was curious what this means to win it for Billy, what he's done this year for the team.

TAUREAN GREEN: Nah, Coach Donovan, he's been hard on me all year (laughter). I know because he cares about me. As well he cares about every other player that he coaches. I just gave him a hug. I was happy for him and especially happy for him 'cause, you know, him, I don't think he really gets enough credit of how great of a coach he is. I can say that. All the players on our team will say that.

I was just happy, happy for us, happy for our team. I just gave him a big hug.

THE MODERATOR: Taurean, Lee, Joakim, thank you very much. Congratulations.

We'll start with questions for Coach Donovan.

Q. Reflection of playing in a Final Four, not winning, and finally winning a national championship. Coach Pitino was in the stands. What are your emotions right now?

COACH BILLY DONOVAN: Well, you know, I think like I said when I first -- when we first got here to Indianapolis, I get great pleasure seeing these kids enjoy it, seeing our university enjoy it, our administration. I really mean that.

It's not about me. You know, it's not about how young I am. They were asking me questions about, I don't know, second youngest coach they said to me. I don't know all the stats. But it's about the people you coach

all the time. I tell you this, I get a great deal of pleasure seeing our kids celebrate, seeing our administration celebrate, seeing how hard everybody else works.

We're sitting up here today as the national champions. But I still don't necessarily believe that we may be the best team in the country 'cause when you're playing in an event that's a one-shot deal, anything can happen. I've been on the side of it where it's ended heartbreaking, and now I've been on the side of it where it's obviously just an incredible feeling.

I'm very thankful and appreciative that at 40 years old I've had a chance to experience four Final Fours. I've had a chance to get drafted, to play in a Final Four. I've had a chance to coach at a place like Kentucky. I've had a guy like Coach Pitino that has been with me since I've been 20 years old. My family's played a major role. My wife and my kids.

There's a lot of people to be thankful for, that put me in this situation to be able to do this. That's what I realize is that, you know, after playing, I don't view Coach Pitino as the coach that took me to the Final Four. I view him as the coach that taught me so many things that I could hand down and carry on and share with other kids. To me, that's what it's ultimately about.

Q. Your tournament offense mindset was layups, dunks and Lee Humphrey. Looks like that played out perfectly. Could you comment on that.

COACH BILLY DONOVAN: I think that we're a very, very dangerous team in transition. But I also think sometimes we get -- can get going too fast. You know, actually Joakim and Al, they do about as good a job on the break as our guards do. I think sometimes we've got to know our role on the break. I really felt like there were times when Taurean came down on the break during the course of the season, he would let some threes go, Cory would let some threes go.

My whole thing was get to the rims, layups, dunks and Lee Humphrey in transition. If you get a layup, dunk in transition, or if Lee Humphrey can let one go from the three-point, that's what we're looking for immediately. To me the guy that orchestrated everything tonight, didn't shoot the ball particularly well, didn't make a three-pointer, Taurean ran our team. He could have had a big offensive night because I thought he had some pretty decent looks. There was some tough shots he took at the end of the clock that we put him in a bad situation.

But gosh, did he really run our team and make everybody else better. He made life so much easier for Horford, Noah, our front court, because we kept running middle pick-and-roll. Either he was throwing to people on and dumping it off for a dunk or he's throwing the ball back to Joakim where he could drive it down the lane.

Q. How does this compare to anything that happened to you on Wall Street?

COACH BILLY DONOVAN: That's why I'm sitting up here coaching right now (laughter). I didn't enjoy that too much.

Q. You said the other day that you didn't want your life to be defined by a championship. Now that you have one, doesn't it kind of free you from all that kind of questions and pressure?

COACH BILLY DONOVAN: Well, I think the questions and the pressures come from you guys. The biggest thing that I have to be able to do is be at peace with myself. Does that mean next year all of a sudden I say, you know what, I won a national championship, therefore I can just coast through it? You know what, I'll have a team in front of me next year that deserves my best and deserves the same thing.

So I don't look at it as, you know what, it's -- like I said, I've been through some very, very difficult losses in this tournament over the years and been through some unbelievable wins. I mean, I was on the bench at the Kentucky game, we lost to Duke at the buzzer. I was on the bench as a head coach against Gonzaga when Casey Calvary tipped one in that eliminated us from going to the Elite 8.

I watched our team, you know, not come out prepared, whether it was my fault or all of our's fault, we all take part in it, against the Manhattan team a couple years ago. That was very disappointing.

But I think it's all about what you're trying to do in your life and how you feel about it. I don't think I've been a person that's tried to let other people define for me what it's all about. Believe me, I'm very, very thankful. I could be sitting up here -- UCLA is a great team. I could be sitting up here as the losing coach from Florida. I'm just not a big believer that this tournament "defines people, coaches, teams, individuals." I'll never believe that because too much can happen in a one-game situation. I think too much goes into it. We make too much out of it in terms of recognizing greatness.

You know what, I'm not trying to go off on a tangent here, greatness to me is the way Dean Smith's players talk about him. Greatness to me is the way John Wooden's players talk about him. That's greatness. 'Cause you know what, tomorrow this is over. It's over with. It's on to the next thing.

But when you affect people's lives, that can carry on for generations and a lifetime. I'm more interested in trying to affect people's lives in a positive way, taking what I've been through as a person and a player and maybe hand some things down. You know what, it's not about me, it's about what I can give.

Q. We've been hearing for years about the lack of quality big men in college basketball. For Joakim to perform at the level he did throughout this tournament, do you have a sense of how significant that was and what caliber of player he's becoming?

COACH BILLY DONOVAN: I told him walking over here, the one thing I respect and admire about him, it's been an emotional rollercoaster ride or could have been for him this year. There were so many things coming at him about how we're going to replace David Lee. This kid plays two or three minutes a game last year, is he ready to step in for David Lee and all this other stuff. He kept working, working. Never used his mouth to defend himself.

He just went out there and worked every single day. You could see him getting better and better and better. First guy in the gym, last guy to leave. You look at his free-throw shooting from last year. He stayed in the gym, I mean this, every single day shooting free-throws. What he did with his free-throw percentage was just sheer hard work. What he did to his game was sheer hard work. You know, what he started to get more and more attention as the season went along and it never affected his work ethic.

I think sometimes when kids are young and they have success and they get attention, they have a tendency to become complacent, think they've got it all figured out. He just kept working, working and working.

Handled things so well. When he started to get attention, to try to deflect it as best he could to our team.

I'm happy for him, that maybe myself and my staff could play a role in helping him develop as a player. He played a great game. But he was able to play a great game because Taurean Green most of the game had his man on him which freed him up to do things. He did a nice job around the basket defensively.

I think Joakim would be the first one to tell you, you know what, it was probably through Taurean and the guards that he got freed up to make things happen.

Q. Coach, can you talk about any changes that you might have made in your two-day prep from semifinal to final this time compared with 2000, a comment on the value of experience.

COACH BILLY DONOVAN: You know, I would say this: UCLA is a great team.

They're playing very good basketball. I think about Ben Howland is a terrific coach.

They're a team to me defensively, the more passes you make inside your offense, the more chance they have to steal it and you can turn it over.

The 2000 team at Florida played against, by far, the best team in the country that year in Michigan State.

They were the best team in the country. The best team we played. There wasn't anything I, per se, changed.

There was an offensive game plan that we had coming into the game that we thought we needed to do to try to take advantage of the way they played defense. A lot of it was through a high number of assists, extra pass and ball movement because they helped so much.

I looked down at the stat sheet. 21 assists, six turnovers, I thought was the difference in the game.

Q. Obviously you wanted to win for your school. Florida is a very big state, a lot of people. It's never had anything like this happen to them before. First national championship in basketball in state history. Does that mean anything to you?

COACH BILLY DONOVAN: Absolutely. I'll tell you one thing, Dr. Cassisi, our faculty rep, he grabbed me before the game. He said, you know something Billy, the greatest thing you can do in life is to start something from scratch and build it up to an elite level. Over a 10-year period, there's been a lot of hard work, sweat that's gone into it. But my first two years at Florida, we had losing records. We won 12 games my first year there, I think we won 14 the next year, then we got to a Sweet-16, we got to a Final Four. I realized the magnitude of what's happened for the program. It's a huge milestone. I mean, it's a huge thing for our state, for our fans. I'm so privileged, blessed. I've thanked God every day that I have my family, friends that are here, the administration that we have, the players that we've recruited, the coaching staff, that I could be a part of something so significant.

And what happened today with these kids for Florida basketball and the state of Florida I think is extremely significant. I'm happy to be a part of it.

Q. You said you're not sure you had the best team in this tournament. You had a pretty dominating run. What do you think went into peaking at the right time?

COACH BILLY DONOVAN: I think that's really overrated and overblown. You know what, I hear that all the time, that people say they're peaking at the right time. Don't you think every team would have their team playing the best basketball if they could peak them at the right time?

I think our team got better. I think they were a very, very focused group that worked hard, that through our losses in the middle of February, we learned. I mean, I go back to those losses. Taurean Green's wearing down, the team's getting tired, they're young, teams are figuring them out. Everybody loves to create the drama around all this tournament and everything.

There is no drama. I mean, I'm not trying to bust up stories here. But every coach would have their team playing their best basketball at the end of the year. I mean, what coach goes in and says, I got us playing

really bad right now? You want to get better.

I think that timing, I think your opponent, and the fact that we lost some games. You look at what we did defensively, I know -- see, I think one of the things our guys took great pride in tonight is we had, I feel, a tougher road to get to this point than the other teams. What I mean by that is, George Mason was America's team. And rightfully so. What they did was significant. But I think all our guys heard about for the last day and a half was how great defensively UCLA is. I don't think our basketball team got a whole lot of credit about how good they are defensively.

I think because of the three-game losing streak that we had there, we were giving up 45% from the three-point line. We had to go through that before they could understand how important a three-point line was to defend. I think those things got us better.

If there's one thing I think that I was able to do in this NCAA tournament each step of the way because I'd been there, I felt like I had been able to give our guys all of this, the distraction piece of it, so much attention, I felt like I was able to help them narrow their focus.

One of the things coming into this game is everybody talks about the end result. National championship. You're playing for the national championship. You're playing for the national championship. I think the only experience I tried to use from 2000 was, you got to want this night to last as long as you can. You got to want them to put more time on the clock. You got to love playing. You're not playing -- you're playing a game right now, living each moment, play each moment.

They peaked and probably played well because of maybe some setbacks we had in February that helped us grow.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, thank you. Congratulations.

COACH BILLY DONOVAN: Thank you very much.