

April 2, 2006



An interview with:

## FLORIDA GATORS

THE MODERATOR: Student-athletes will join us shortly. We'll go ahead and take questions for **Coach Donovan** without an opening statement.

**Q. After watching what UCLA did to LSU last night, what were your first thoughts?**

COACH BILLY DONOVAN: Well, it was obviously extremely impressive. The last time we played **LSU**, they were a little bit undermanned in the **SEC** tournament. **Darrel Mitchell** was hobbled with a sore ankle. **Tyrus Thomas** didn't play in the tournament because of his ankle injury. So I would say the **LSU** team that we played in the **SEC** tournament was definitely undermanned.

Clearly from start to finish in our league, they went 14-2. They were the **SEC** champions. They were the best team in our league. With **Mitchell** on a hobbled ankle, **Tyrus Thomas** not playing, we ended up winning by 15 or 16. But it was a one- or two-point game with four, five, six minutes to go. We made a couple shots and were able to get on the break and pulled away.

I think what **LSU** did last -- what **UCLA** did to **LSU** last night was extremely impressive.

**Q. When you were at Providence, how would you have rated yourself as a defensive player? How did you come to your defensive philosophy, get the Gators to play defense like this?**

COACH BILLY DONOVAN: I was a defensive stopper. I shut guys down, that's what I did. Didn't shoot it very much.

My feeling, really from a defensive standpoint, every team practices what they do offensively every single day. Because they practice what they do, over the course of a season, they become very good at what they run.

My philosophy defensively is to try to take teams out of what they practice every single day, whether it be through pressing, through three-quarter court pressing, through trapping pick-and-rolls, trapping the low post, trying to do things to disrupt the course of the flow of a game.

I think what that hopefully does is creates transition opportunities for us, creates maybe steals to get out into transition. But more than anything else, my feeling, the way I like to do it, is to try to disrupt the flow of what you're doing on offense.

**Q. Can you recount the conversation or two that you had with Coach Pitino back when he was trying to dissuade you from taking this job, also what you thought the one or two big projects were going to be to turn Florida into something.**

COACH BILLY DONOVAN: Well, **Coach Pitino** was still at **Kentucky** at the time. When **Florida** had called, I spoke to him and asked him what he thought. He told me, **Billy**, it's not a good situation, you don't need to do that. At the time **Jayson Williams** was at **Marshall** with me. We had won our side. We had the majority of our players returning. We had a good team. We played **Kentucky** that year. I think **Coach Pitino** thought in '94 when **Florida** went to the **Final Four**, what was in the program at that time, that maybe the expectations were a little bit unrealistic in terms of where the program was at. He just felt like it was going to take a complete overhaul to turn that around, and I would be better off staying with a team that at **Marshall** was probably going to have a good year.

Probably what changed my mind more so than anything else was when I met with **Jeremy Foley**. In that meeting, it was very, very clear that he understood where things were at and he understood what needed to happen to try to turn the program. I think **Lon Kruger** came in at a time that was very difficult because there was some problems there. I think he really restored the credibility and he took a team to the **Final Four**.

and really changed the face of **Florida** basketball.

Right before he left, there were some downtimes after the **Final Four**. I think after speaking to **Coach Pitino**, he had a chance to talk to **Jeremy**. I just told him that I really felt in speaking to **Jeremy** that administratively there was going to be a very, very strong commitment to basketball, there was going to be a strong commitment to try to get basketball going, and that he understood exactly where the program was at and what needed to be done. That was probably the most comforting thing to me.

I think sometimes when you're in a situation like that, you talk to an administrator, all of a sudden the feeling is Hey, listen, we have the team to go right back to the **Final Four**, this is great. It wasn't that type of feel. I think **Jeremy** really felt like football gets a lot of publicity, exposure, not only in our school, but in the state. I think **Jeremy's** goal and vision was why can't football and basketball and baseball and women's volleyball, why can't everybody do well?

I think one thing all the coaches at **Florida** would say is that **Jeremy** in relationship to their sport tries to give everybody the necessary means to do the best job they can competing in the sport they're playing in.

**Q. Anthony Grant, what has he meant to your program and to you? Why isn't he maybe a head coach yet?**

COACH BILLY DONOVAN: Why isn't he? **Anthony** is one of my closest friends in life. He's been with me from day one when I took the job at **Marshall** when I was 27 years old. He has done a terrific job recruiting, coaching, what he stands for, what his values are.

But I also think **Anthony** is a very simplistic is probably not the right word, but he's very, very grounded. I think when sometimes guys are assistant coaches for a long period of time, they have an itch that they want to go be a head coach, they take any job. I think **Anthony** has had several opportunities and will continue to, but I think for **Anthony**, having four children and being in **Gainesville** for 10 years now, a big part of him, he always says it, it's got to be an unbelievable situation for me to ever leave. It's not like my ego is such that I got to be a head coach. So the first job that comes available that they're interested in me, that I'm just going to leave. That's just kind of the way he is.

I've done nothing by try to help **Anthony** in that area. But he to me is as good as there is in the business at what he does. He's terrific. He's had some interests, but at the same time I think he's felt the situation he has at **Florida** is just where he wants to be right now.

**Q. Could you talk about what you've seen in Ben Howland's defense, just how unusual that is for a school like UCLA to play that Big East style of gritty defense.**

COACH BILLY DONOVAN: Well, I think **UCLA** has won a lot of national championships. I don't think you win national championships without playing defense. I'm sure **Coach Wooden's** teams played very good defense as well.

They are very, very disciplined with the way they play defense. They help each other extremely well. They like to take you out of what you want to do. They're very, very physical. They have a great ability to be very physical, body you, take you off cuts. The biggest thing to me that I love about their defense is they're a great help team. They really rotate to each other. They really help each other. I think one of the big keys in defense is a lot of times guys are afraid to leave their man and give help because they're worried about the next guy rotating to their man. He certainly has got them rotating and helping one another.

I think that they'll be as good of a defensive team tomorrow night that we've played all year. They do an outstanding job.

You hear people talk all the time that it's East Coast to West Coast. It's almost I take it as like the West Coast kids don't want to play defense. I don't know if I necessarily agree with that.

I think what he has done is taken his style, his beliefs from **Pittsburgh** and now has transformed it into **UCLA**. But I think the big thing in any system or any style, there's a lot of ways to skin a cat, a lot of ways to play. I think really what it comes down to as a head coach is what your belief is in it, how strongly you believe in what you do, and that belief has to go through to the players so the players see this is the way we're going to play because you have a belief in it. That to me is the most important thing. It's very clear his beliefs and the way the game needs to be played on the defensive end of the floor, he has great belief in it. I think his team has great belief in it.

**Q. I know you want to win for the kids, the program, the school. Roy Williams cried when he won last year. What will it mean to you to win this thing? You played here, you lost here.**

COACH BILLY DONOVAN: I really mean this. This is not about me. That's not my job. My job is to try to coach and teach these guys of what it takes to be successful on the court, what it is to be part of a team, what it is to sacrifice. They're going to leave here someday. I said this. You know, my most important thing to me from a coaching perspective is going to be how these guys talk about me as a human being and what I've been able to teach them in terms of their life so that when they're a parent, they're a husband, a coworker with somebody, they can reflect back at their time at **Florida** and say that, you know, I've helped them in that area.

I think in coaching, and I also think in life, I feel like my main responsibility is to serve. My responsibility is to serve the **University of Florida**, my responsibility is to serve these kids, the assistant coaches in the program. I'll be excited if that happens tomorrow night, but I'm not going to be, wow, this is great for me.

I really believe in life if you help people, you do a good job of helping people, you get rewarded 10 fold for what you do. I never want our team ever to feel like it's about me because I think that would be totally selfish.

I'm a part of it, and I'll be very, very happy that I was privileged to be a part of it and coach these group of kids. But for me to sit there and say I'm satisfied or this is great, this is great for **Billy Donovan**, I just -- that's not what it's about for me, it really isn't.

**Q. Al, you guys have been dealing the last three weekends with the sense of finality, that if you lose it's over. Now you know it's finality. Do you approach it differently at all?**

AL HORFORD: You know, we're going to do the same things we've been doing all year long, watch film on 'em, practice regular and, you know, we're trying to keep everything the same. We're not trying to change anything.

**Q. How much of what you believe in today has its roots when you were a player at Providence? Do you think there's such a thing as a Big East mentality or style that might be**

**on display tomorrow night because of Howland's background at Pittsburgh?**

COACH BILLY DONOVAN: The first part of the question was?

**Q. How much of what your coaching philosophy was based on what you went through as a player?**

COACH BILLY DONOVAN: I think a lot of it is. In particular, on the offensive end of the floor because I wasn't the most athletic guy so I try to put our guys in situations and create extra passing and ball movement and unselfish and try to score through our team. I think a lot of that.

But also, you know, playing for **Coach Pitino**, working with him, he's always said that the system, you should take it, tweak it, try to make it better. But there's no question I think any coach who's played the game, a lot of their philosophies come out of what they've experienced as a player.

I do believe there are different styles of play throughout the country. Unlike the **NBA**, who has "a league of **NBA** officials," that you see everybody, the **PAC-10** has their set of officials, the **Big East** has their set of officials, the **SEC** has their set of officials. I would say just nationally, I think we're all trying to get under one umbrella.

We've had in this tournament officials outside the **SEC** that I think have done a terrific job. It's been good. This comment is not good nor bad. I think in different parts of the country, the games are officiated a little bit differently. I think what everybody is trying to do is get everything under one umbrella.

Is the **Big East** more physical than the **ACC**? Is the **Big 12** more physical than the **SEC**? I don't know. We're playing against a team, regardless if it's **Pittsburgh, UCLA, Ben** has been at both places, I think it's his style, his system, what he believes in in that he's carrying on. I think if **Ben** was to leave there, go somewhere to the Midwest, I think he should still carry his style of play and how he feels the game should be played to the next place he went to.

**Q. Corey, for the last game, you sort of cast your team as the bad guys trying to ruin the Cinderella story. You said you seemed to enjoy the role. What is the role you envision your team in for this game and why do you see it that way?**

COREY BREWER: It's the same as it's



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been all year. Nobody's ever really given us a chance to win the national championship. Now we're in the championship game. We're just going out there, we're going to play our style of play, and we're hopefully going to get a victory.

**Q. Jordan Farmar has said he was going to Florida until Ben Howland-- until he met with Ben Howland at the last minute. Did you think you were confident you were going to get him? What did you see in him then as a recruit? How do you feel he has developed?**

COACH BILLY DONOVAN: He's really made a poor choice, didn't he (smiling)?

No, I'm happy for *Jordan*. He's in a great situation. He's gotten a lot better as a basketball player, as I knew he would. He's a hard-working kid. *Jordan* never told me that he was coming to *Florida*. Although he did visit, I felt like we had a good visit on our campus, we did spend time recruiting him. I think at that time *UCLA* was probably in a transition period a little bit.

I think when you're from out west, *UCLA* represents certainly a whole lot in the state of *California*, but nationally, *UCLA* program with *Coach Wooden*, the coaches that have been there after, the success of the program, what it means, I think with *Ben* probably coming in there and getting a chance to develop a relationship with *Jordan*, where his vision was at *UCLA*, how he thought he -- where he thought he was going to take the program, how *Jordan* would fit in, it probably for him felt like, hey, listen, that's great.

I always think it's very, very difficult for a young man to come all the way across the coast. It's hard. Especially when you have programs that are out west as an *Arizona*, a *Stanford*, *UCLA*, very, very good programs.

I think *Jordan* liked the *University of Florida* a lot. But at the same point, maybe with what *Ben* was able to talk to him about after he got the job, maybe made him feel a little bit more comfortable, staying close to home to play.

**Q. You talked a lot about being a football school or being at a football school. With two Final Fours in six years, a national title, do you think basketball won't be so much of an afterthought maybe like in the fall, that maybe this would put you guys on almost equal footing with that program?**

COACH BILLY DONOVAN: I don't know if I agree with that. I don't think that basketball has

ever been an afterthought, at least since I've been here. There's no question, I've said this many times, in the southeast, in terms of fan enthusiasm and fan excitement, it is for football. In the states of *Kentucky* and *Indiana*, the fanfare and enthusiasm is for basketball. I understand that. *Billy Donovan* is not changing that culture.

I've said this a lot. The thing that's bigger than football for a *Florida* fan is the *University of Florida*. There's more passion for the *University of Florida* than any other sport. People love the *University of Florida* that are associated with it.

I think just based on what we've been able to do over the last 10 years as a program, I'm not sitting there saying that basketball is more important than football or trying to get into a pecking order. But I think our program has gotten respect. I think our program from where it was in terms of a lot of pockets of success, nothing sustained, the way our home court is in terms of the environment these guys have a chance to play in, I would say that our program has very good respect.

I don't feel that our program at all is ever an afterthought. I think people have followed us all the way through and have been very, very supportive. They'll do the same thing with baseball starting up after our season is over with. I don't feel that way personally.

**Q. You have some kids here with some very famous dads. Generally speaking, they claim there's not added pressure. Is that possible? I was wondering how you see it.**

COACH BILLY DONOVAN: No, I don't think there's added pressure on them. I think that all these guys love their family, love their parents, appreciate and respect. But I also think there's a part of them that they want to put their own footprints in life, carve their own niche just as their parents have done. That's not any slight or anything else, they're jealous. They love their parents to death. Their parents have been great role models and have done a great job raising them. Their parents have tried to provide the same opportunity for these guys that maybe their families have provided.

For them, I don't think there's any added pressure at all. If anything, I think it's a motivating factor that they see their parents in that light and they see what can be achieved and they've taken probably the knowledge and experience that

they've had as a professional athlete and been able to hand it down to them.

But I think maybe there's pressure when you're five, six, seven, eight years old, you're looking to kind of create your own identity. Oh, that's **Sidney Green's** son. I'm sure for most of his life it's been **Sidney Green's** son, **Yannick Noah's** son, **Tito Horford's** son. Now that's **Joakim Noah**, that's **Taurean Green**. By the way, their dad is this person. I think they're trying to create their own footprints in life. I think their parents want them to do that.

**Q. For Sidney Green's son and Corey, Joakim plays with a lot of emotion, enthusiasm. The first time you started playing with him, when you saw that, what was your response to it and has there ever been one time where he's gotten so emotional that it kind of stunned you for a second?**

TAUREAN GREEN: He's an emotional guy. He's such a great competitor. He always wants to win. I remember in one of the practices last year, he got upset a little bit, threw the ball at the wall or something. I forgot what happened.

No, it's not because he's frustrated. It's just because he wants to win. Every time he goes out and competes, we know what we're going to get out of him emotionally.

COREY BREWER: He's just a fun guy to play with because he brings it every night. He has all the energy. He's going to play the same way no matter what. He's just going to bring it every night. I just love playing with him.

**Q. The players who haven't had much to say so far, what do the letters and the name of UCLA actually mean to you? Their greatest success came before you guys were even born. You're from another generation. How do you look at their program?**

JOAKIM NOAH: Well, I know that they have great tradition, they had a lot of great players go through that program. But I don't think that helps you win the game tomorrow. So right now it's not about tradition, it's about playing basketball, playing the sport that we've been playing since we were little kids, just enjoying playing, enjoying every moment, enjoy playing on the big stage.

LEE HUMPHREY: Very aware of **UCLA's** history. **ESPN Classic**, all the great players that they've had at the school. I think they've got a lot

of really good players now, very talented team. Should be a fun game tomorrow.

**Q. Joakim, you talked a few weeks ago about how this team may be remembered, the importance of winning a championship. Can you explain that thought now that you're here? How strongly do you feel you need to win tomorrow to be talked about in the future the way you want to be talked about?**

JOAKIM NOAH: I don't think it's about that. Right now we're not really thinking about how people are going to remember us. It's about just playing possession by possession, it's really seizing the moment. Coach always tells us not to worry about what happened in the past; what's going to happen in the future, especially when you're playing in a position like this in the **Final Four**. I mean, in the championship game, there's no feeling like it. It's a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

We're just soaking it in, enjoying every moment. At the end of the day, it's all about playing basketball. That's what we love to do.

**Q. How important do you think UCLA's tradition and history is as far as maintaining that program, luring recruits? How important is building tradition for you at your school? Would winning a national championship go a long way toward establishing that tradition?**

COACH BILLY DONOVAN: It's obviously very difficult to win a national championship, to be able to win six games. When you look at **UCLA's** program, I'm much older than these guys, that I understand what **UCLA** basketball represents. But I also think, and I don't know the last time they won a national championship, I know when **Jim Harrick** was there, but I'm not so sure when it was before that. I never felt like **UCLA** has ever struggled in recruiting because they're not winning national championship after national championship after national championship.

I just think what's happened in college basketball, you've got **Duke, North Carolina, Kansas, Kentucky, UCLA**. Those programs in terms of their tradition I don't think have really struggled or ever struggled in recruiting. They've been able to do a fabulous job. We realize that, I think like **Joakim** said, the tradition doesn't have anything to do with tomorrow night, but I think it probably has something to do to their players,

because their players understand what they're representing in terms of what **UCLA** represents.

A lot of times it's the past players that they know are watching them that have a level of expectation of the way they're supposed to perform. I think that's a good thing for a program.

That's what we're trying to build here at **Florida**. I hope that there's someday, if I'm here long enough, that guys will come back and look at these guys and say, you know what, I need to go out and play well, because **Joakim Noah** and **Al Horford** and **Corey Brewer**, **Taurean Green**, **Lee Humphrey**, they play with great passion. Those guys are watching me, with them watching me there's a level I have to uphold. That's what we're trying to create. We don't have that right now in terms of we've been doing it long enough.

**UCLA** has been going I don't know for I don't know how many years. **Kentucky** has been going...

It has to start somewhere. Hopefully that's something that will be carried on. That's what we're trying to build at **Florida**. It's never been done. It hasn't been sustained.

**UCLA, Kentucky, North Carolina, Duke**, that's been sustained for so, so long. You know, the past tradition doesn't necessarily have anything to do with the game, but I'm sure there's a level of expectation that the players feel they have to uphold.

**Q. With a team that early in the season was perceived as being maybe a year away, what have been a few or maybe the biggest keys to going this far?**

COACH BILLY DONOVAN: Well, just the main piece has been their willingness to remain extremely unselfish, their ability not to embrace success. I think that's the hardest thing that happens to a team is, when you get to be 17-0, you can think it's easy or that you got it all figured out. They really remained very humble. They wanted to get better.

I think the losses that we went through this year, I've said this many times, have helped our basketball team understand how to get beat. We were able to make corrections. I would say besides the passion, the unselfishness, playing hard, they're a very, very attentive group that care about each other a great deal, want to be coached, want information and want to get better.

I think that's the key. Although they're young in terms of their year in class, they're a little

bit older mentally in terms of what they've got to zero in and focus in on. That's been a bit surprising to me because I didn't know what to expect. I felt like we'd play unselfish, we'd play hard, and they'd give me everything they had night in and night out. But I didn't know when the experience factor would kick in, would we be able to overcome that.

**Al** started but was pretty much a defender, rebounder for us. **Corey** was the same thing, perimeter defender, slasher. **Corey** was our leading scorer coming back from last year's name, scoring seven points a game. There was a lot of uncertainty. These guys have shown when you play together as a team what can be accomplished.

So you talk about **UCLA's** tradition. I'm hoping teams that continue to come up, this will be a reflection of what a group of guys, a collection of guys, can do together.

THE MODERATOR: We'll let the five starters go to the breakout rooms.

We'll continue with questions for **Coach Donovan**.

**Q. Two years after the Manhattan loss, you outlined what sounded like a new vision for the program. Did you know what you had coming in with that class or did you think it was time to get tougher, to have a little bit different personality in the program?**

COACH BILLY DONOVAN: Uhm, that team there a couple years ago, and I'd say even the year before that, we kind of came limping into the **NCAA** tournament. Two years ago when we lost to **Manhattan** in the **NCAA** tournament, I think it was only the second time maybe in school history in recent time that **Florida** had been to an **SEC** championship game. **Walsh** was hurt. We were banged up. That's not making excuses. I just didn't like the passion we played with in that tournament.

I think the landscape of college basketball continues to change because of the **NBA** draft. What you're seeing right now is with the 19-year-old age limit, so many kids leaving early, you've got to do a great job evaluating I think between those kids maybe in the top 25 to 100 'cause there's so much parity.

Really to me what changes a player from being different from another player is their personality, their makeup and who they are. With

the way recruiting is set up now in the **NCAA**, we don't have enough access on the phone, in person, to get those questions answered. A lot of times you think you're getting one thing and you realize what you're getting is something else. It's not the young man's fault, it's not the coach's fault; it's a lack of time.

I look at what **NBA** teams do in terms of the background research they do before they draft guys, all the work they do, the amount of time they do, they bring them in, psychologically test them, talk to them, ask them questions, work them out, and they still make mistakes on guys sometimes.

How can you expect college coaches to sit there and look at a guy and say, you know what, we're going to recruit him.

So much of it right now has nothing to do with the talent level, it has so much to do with their makeup, what they're about. If you have a great player has a great level of unselfishness and work ethic, he's going to overachieve and go beyond where he thought he could go. If you have a guy that's talented but that's totally into himself, never had to be unselfish a day in his life, it's really hard to change that mentality.

So when I say that I went about changing recruiting, my feeling in changing the recruiting was much, much more in terms of getting guys that were going to be in our program for several years so we could have some injury, junior senior classes. It's been so long since we've had three or four guys in a junior or a senior class. We've always had a young people.

Part of it has been because our program has been successful and some of the kids inside our program have been successful and they've had opportunities outside. But we have this reputation, all these **McDonald's All-American**, we have one on our team. It's not the case. I think we got a lot of good kids that have been unselfish and have worked hard and they've gotten better.

**Green** has gotten better, **Horford**, **Noah**, **Humphrey** has gotten better. Our whole team continues to get better because they have the attitude that allows you as a person, a coach, to try to help them get to the next level as a player and a person.

**Q. What did you think of Luc Richard last night? Did you see him much in high school?**

COACH BILLY DONOVAN: Yes, I did. Came from a great high school program at

**Montverde** with **Kevin Sutton**. Really liked him a lot as a player. I wasn't sure if he was exactly what we needed at that time during the recruiting process, but really liked him a lot. Certainly he made a great decision for himself. I think he's had a huge impact on **UCLA's** program. He has done a lot of different things. I think he complements his teammates very well. His teammates complement him very well. I'm happy for him 'cause he's a very nice kid.

**Q. Lee had a big night last night. Could you talk about how confident you are when he's got the ball behind the arc, and also what are you expecting out of UCLA as far as their perimeter defense, stopping the three-pointer?**

COACH BILLY DONOVAN: One of the worst feelings you can have as a coach is when you see a guy rise up and take a three-point shot and know it's got no chance of going in. That is not a good feeling.

The one thing about **Lee** is when he lets it go, you feel that it's got a pretty good chance of going in. I'm sure **UCLA** is very conscious of **Lee**, the way he has shot the basketball. Again, they're a very good defensive team. I don't think they're going to do anything, let's say scheme-wise, we're going to change our defensive principles and what we've done up to this point in time to shut him down. But there's ways to track him, eye him, to make sure he doesn't get off very many clean looks.

**Lee** is one of those guys that's patient. He's not a -- force a lot of shots. He gets the shots in within the framework of our offense. Like I said last night, our guys do a pretty good job of finding him in transition, when the ball gets inside to out. **Lee** does a pretty good job of finding ways to get into some open areas.

**Q. Does the fact that you've been here for a Monday night game help you in any way? Was there anything different going from Saturday to Monday in 2000 that can you take and apply to this year?**

COACH BILLY DONOVAN: Well, I think the first thing is you realize how long of a time it is from last night's game all the way to Monday night. It's a long time. Feels like a week.

With that being said, in a lot of ways it's a very, very short time. After we're done with media,

we got to go on the court and practice. We've been up watching film. We've gotten to this point as a basketball team because of what we've been able to do up to this point in time. But you still have to scout, you have to prepare, you have to do different things. But at the same point there's a fine line when you have a one-day prep situation like you do where you don't want your guys maybe overthinking so much, but you don't want your guys being in a situation where they don't know some key points.

Maybe being here in 2000, I felt like the 2000 team, we played against **Michigan State** that was there before, their kids were, and **Tom Izzo** was there before. They were clearly the best team. I don't know if we would have played them again if the outcome would have been any different. They were just a better team than us at that game. We were a good team. I don't think anybody expected that team to get to the national championship game.

So I think the big thing right now is just to try to make sure our guys get rest, narrow their focus, try to give them some things that they can take into the game, get prepared and ready to play tomorrow night.

**Q. You've talked about how much you like this team, the way they play within the team structure. Is it challenging having a guy like Joakim who is so individual, also emotional? Have you had to talk to him about using that emotion positively?**

COACH BILLY DONOVAN: Well, I would say personality-wise he and I are a lot alike. I'm almost scared to say something like that publicly. I think we both share great passion for the game. I think we both have energy. I think we're both competitive.

I can relate to him very well. I think **Taurean** made a very good point. There's times where he shows his emotion, and sometimes it's not in a good way. But it's not that he's frustrated. He just wants to win.

He is somewhat of a free spirit. When I say "free spirit," he's not a guy that's into himself or being individualized or -- he wears his hair in a ponytail. Some people that would bother. That doesn't bother me. He's also a guy that doesn't have a lot of tattoos on himself either. He's an easy guy to coach because he cares so much. When you got somebody that cares about

something so much, in my position, I can help him channel his emotions the right way.

He's gotten so much better from his freshman year to now being able to channel that. Sometimes he gets too emotional, too hyped up, that you got to get him to channel it right the right way.

For me he's been an easy guy to coach because I think I'm passionate also, and I understand how it feels to be passionate about, therefore I can relate to him and help him.

But he doesn't do anything individually that I would say draws crazy attention to himself where you feel like this guy, it's all about him. I think when you hear him talk, his comments are always about the team, it's about winning, it's about playing together, it's about playing hard. He never really talks much about what he wants. He's about as unselfish of a kid and caring of a kid as I've been around.

The thing I respect about him so much is I work him out in individual instruction. He'll thank me like four and five times walking off the floor. Some guys go through an individual instruction, they leave. I don't expect to be thanked. That's the way he is. He comes to my house, all of our guys do, but he comes out, he gives my wife a hug and says, "Thanks for dinner." He sees my kids. He gives them a hug. He takes time for them.

Those are the things to me that are most important about him, is he has a genuine passion for his life, the game of basketball and people. He really likes people and he respects people.

**Q. When you did recruit Noah, did you think as much or more about his defensive potential for you as his offensive potential? With regard to losing players early to the NBA or never getting them at all, has there ever been any serious discussion with you and your peers, have you ever entertained the thought of trying a strategy of under-recruiting in the hopes of accumulating one of these three-and four-year teams?**

COACH BILLY DONOVAN: I think it's a great question, something that we've talked about a lot. To the first question, **Joakim**, when I saw him in high school, was not a great athlete in terms of off the floor. He was a fabulous straight-ahead runner. He was good on his feet. You could see that his size and physicality at times were a disadvantage to him that didn't really allow him to

block shots because guys would take the ball to his body and would neutralize him.

He's gotten considerably stronger from high school, which has allowed him to hold his position and effect shots a little bit more. I think that's an area where I didn't know what kind of shot blocker he would be. He's always been a terrific runner. He's a guy that plays to complete exhaustion. He has a great threshold to continually run through fatigue. A lot of guys sometimes when they get tired in the course of the game, they try to take a play off, relax. Not him. He plays all the way a hundred percent full throttle.

I think the recruiting part is exactly what we're all trying to do now. The complexion in college basketball has changed so much. For a while there, 10 years ago, everybody talked about, if you really want to win at the college level, you have to have two or three pros on your team. I'm not so sure that's the case any more. I think exactly what you're talking about, you know some of those high school kids out there that are destined for the **NBA**. It's hard not to have one foot in college and one foot on the **NBA**.

Also, I think evaluating. If there was one thing I'd like to see the **NCAA** change, I would love to see a change where we as coaches can get back on the road and have more contact with kids because we need to get to know them. We talk about kids transferring and kids making poor decisions. The reason kids make poor decisions and coaches make poor decisions, we're making decisions with not enough information on who we're recruiting.

For me during the course of the season, it's hard for head coaches to get out. We're practicing every day. Maybe there's a local kid you can go see. We have to be able to have more access in terms of asking them questions about their makeup and who they are, what they want to become. Those are the hard things. I really believe what allows a kid -- I'll give you an example. **Noah** is an example of it. **Taurean Green** is an example of it. I think **Luc Richard** is an example of it. These weren't **McDonald's All-Americans**. There were a lot of kids coming out of high school that were thought of a lot higher than those kids. But it's **Luc Richard's** mentality that allows him to be an effective, really good player for **UCLA**. It's **Noah's** passion and unselfishness that allows him to be a good player.

You can take guys with the same exact athletic ability and talent, but if they don't have the

right makeup in terms of being part of a team, they never reach their potential.

**Q. Can you talk about defending UCLA's quickness, their guards, having faced Villanova, does that help you in preparation?**

COACH BILLY DONOVAN: They have some similarities to **Villanova**. But I would say they're much of a bigger team than **Villanova**. **Villanova** didn't have a lot of depth in their front court. They were going to play **Cunningham, Fraser**, and I forget, I don't remember the other guy's name.

**Q. Clark.**

COACH BILLY DONOVAN: **Clark**. There was one more. **Sheridan**. Those were the three bigs, rotate those three bigs, sometimes going with guards. **UCLA** has a lot more size, length, shot-blocking ability. They're a much, much I would say deeper team than **Villanova** is. I don't know all the stories, but I know **Ben** went through a lot of injuries throughout the course of the season, had some guys out. I felt like when we lost **Humphrey** and **Brewer**, I was hopeful that would make our team better because other guys would have an opportunity to step up.

I would say probably the same has happened for **UCLA**. Some of those kids that had to step into some key roles while some guys were injured probably has enabled those guys to have some confidence.

But their quickness and speed is without question on par with **Villanova**. But I would say they're a much, much longer and deeper team than **Villanova**.

**Q. "Afterthought" is the wrong word. I guess where I'm coming from is back-to-back losses in early October this year, there's just a malaise among Florida fans. Do you think a national championship team would give them something to focus on that's coming up? How daunting was the task to come to Florida and get this going?**

COACH BILLY DONOVAN: The beginning part of the question, I don't really understand what you're saying.

**Q. The beginning of October.**

COACH BILLY DONOVAN: This season?

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Florida Gators – 04.02.06

**Q. They lost back-to-back games. I don't think anybody was sitting there saying, "At least basketball is coming along."**

COACH BILLY DONOVAN: The culture at **Florida**, they're going to go through seasons. Right now football during the month of October is in the heat of their season. Rightfully so. All of our fans' focus should be on football. They should really focus on our football team and support them.

We're starting off right now. I don't think it would be fair, if we happen to win a national championship, I don't think in the middle of October in **Gainesville, Florida**, people are saying, "Hey, listen, the **Gators** are playing against **Steve Spurrier** and the **Gamecocks**."

"Who cares about that. The hoop team is starting practice tomorrow. Let's run over there and find out what's going on." That's not happening, ever.

When the football season ends, that first week in January, I would say from January to March, we have great focus and attention, and people support us. I think it's the same thing for **Pat McMahon** our baseball coach. Once our season ends Monday night, all the shift and focus is going towards baseball, and it should go towards that.

But I don't think the focus in the middle of football season is going to be shifted because **Florida** won a national championship, who cares what's going on in football. I just don't think that's going to happen. And that's okay. I would rather have our fans put all their energy and effort towards supporting the football program during those months.

**Q. How daunting was that? I didn't mean like just focusing on basketball instead of football like at some schools. Spring football practice is going on right now, right?**

COACH BILLY DONOVAN: Right.

**Q. There's going to be focusing on that more than baseball. They're crazy about football in Gainesville. How daunting was that?**

COACH BILLY DONOVAN: When you say "daunting," what do you mean?

**Q. You took over a basketball program at a football school, and now Florida probably along with maybe Texas, and I can't even think of another if you win tomorrow night, is going**

**to be like the best of both worlds kind of thing, if you know what I mean.**

COACH BILLY DONOVAN: I think we have the best of both worlds right now. What I mean by that is this program over the last 10 years I think has made strides to compete nationally, to be mentioned in the breath of programs that are in the top 15 in the country. We do have a unique situation because football and basketball can coexist.

I never really look at it that way, I guess. It's hard for me. I said this before, you got a different mentality at **Florida**. If I'm concerned about that, I'm at the wrong school. What I mean by that is everything is important to the administration. The administration is totally consumed with having the best overall athletics program in the country. If my mentality or agenda is, **Jeremy**, that's great, but I need to know that the fans and you and the administration, basketball's got to be No. 1 here, I'm at the wrong place.

I think when the football team is playing in a Bowl game, playing on national TV, that helps basketball. It's the **University of Florida** being mentioned. I think when the baseball team played against **Texas** last year for a national championship, it's the **University of Florida**. That helps us.

I realize that I'm preaching to these guys all the time about being part of a team. **Billy Donovan** is part of a team at **Florida**, too. I'm not going to get wrapped up into wanting more attention or feeling like we should get more attention or any of that. I'm part of a team and I root for all the sports at **Florida** because I want them to do well because I think that helps our program.

**Q. With recruiting, sometimes do kids get labeled a McDonald's All-Americans just because North Carolina or Duke is recruiting them and maybe not necessarily how good they are? Because UCLA and you are doing so well this year, without tons of McDonald's All-Americans, do you think coaches will take a closer look at how they recruit?**

COACH BILLY DONOVAN: I don't know if kids or the committee who pick those teams say, okay, this guy signed at **North Carolina**, he must be really good, let's put him on the All-American team. This guy signed at **Kansas**, he must be good. I don't know if that happens.

Like anything else, there are kids that go through high school that are probably underrated, under-appreciated, under-valued. There are probably some kids that are overhyped, overpublicized, not as good as people thought they were. I think it happens everywhere.

You try to recruit those kids that have that mentality and a level of talent that can really, really help your team, I think that's what you're looking to try to do.

**Q. Talk about growing up in Rockfield Center, the effect that your dad and Coach Morris had on you. Was your dad a good CYO coach?**

COACH BILLY DONOVAN: He was a great coach because I got all the shots (smiling).

No, you know, that's the one thing that I probably appreciate and respect more about my dad than anything else, is I think sometimes parents, and I see it all the time sometimes, when something goes wrong for their child, it's the coach's fault, it's never the kid's fault. I really went through an emotional rollercoaster ride as a player, both in high school and college. My first two years in high school, I didn't play on the varsity, didn't play a whole lot. My junior year I had a chance to play a lot more. I didn't have one scholarship offer in the early signing period of my senior year. I think it was because of a **Frank Morris** and even my father. My father's thing was, bottom line, the coach wants to win. You're not playing because you're not good enough.

I think that was the reality of it. One of two things: either go out and get to the park and get better as a player or you're not going to play. It's on you. I think the same thing happened at **Providence**. When **Joe Mullaney** left, I was at a crossroads where I was running from my problem. I think probably my dad and **Coach Pitino** forced me to deal with my issue myself, why I wasn't playing. I was 190 pounds, I was way overweight. I didn't work hard enough on my game. I wanted to be given something that I was not deserving of.

Really what it came down to, is are you willing to work or not? Here is what you need to do. If you're not willing to do it, don't expect to play. I never had a father that thought I was the best thing since sliced bread. He was always very up front, very honest, very, very real. I think through his experience as a player playing at **Boston College** helped me to understand what I

had to do to become a better player. That was extremely helpful.

I think **Frank Morris** was as hard on me as any coach that's ever coached me. I think it's those people now looking back on it that probably have moulded and shaped me along with **Coach Pitino** in terms of understanding work ethic, in terms of taking responsibility and accountability for who you are, instead of pointing fingers and making excuses.

**Q. When did the coaching bug sink its teeth in for good? What's the biggest difference in you from the guy who began at Marshall and the one sitting here today?**

COACH BILLY DONOVAN: Well, I would say I think as a player you're all very, very naive. I envisioned myself playing basketball 10 years after college. I don't necessarily mean in the **NBA**. Even if it was overseas, I just wanted to play. Probably one of the more difficult things I went through trying to latch on to an **NBA** team, at best I was going to be an 11th, 12th man, a guy that got cut, a **CBA** traveler.

I think probably at 24 years old I realized that, you know what, living in **Rapid City, South Dakota**, in the **Days Inn** hotel, living in **Casper, Wyoming**, another **Days Inn** hotel. It's great to try to get to the **NBA**. I gave the **NBA** a two-year legitimate shot in my mind, that I needed to get that out of my system as a player.

Going through those things, it's hard when something like that comes to an end because it's almost like, what do I do with myself right now? I've lived in a gym for 10, 12 years, most of my life, just playing. Now I got to do something else.

I think probably the best thing that helped me was going out and looking for a real job. Once I went out and looked for a real job, worked on Wall Street for six months, I knew right then and there, this is not what I want to do. That experience probably helped me realize that I wanted to get into coaching. I felt like I had a lot of offer. I felt like I went through a lot as a player. I had a chance to touch a couple different levels, I experienced some different things. I thought I could give back.

That's one of the things, people talk about winning a national championship. I don't remember **Coach Pitino** saying, okay, he brought me to the **Final Four** or he helped me. I look at all the other things he taught me that were helpful in

my life. If we were fortunate enough to win tomorrow night, it's over. Tuesday morning, it's gone, on to the next thing. That's what you realize in life. I don't want my life to be defined by a national championship. I hoping I'm a better father and a husband and a better person to people.

Listen, the national championship would be great. But to me I thought **Tom Brady's** comments were very interesting on 60 Minutes he made the comment he won three **Super Bowls** and he said, "Is that all there is?" I think there's so much more to life than that.

Don't get me wrong. I want to win as bad as anybody tomorrow. Our kids want to win as bad as anybody tomorrow. I think it's those times back then when I was growing up, going through some of those experiences made me realize how much I love the game, how much I felt like I could help people with the game and with life.

**Q. Connecticut, North Carolina, the last two national championships, both great running teams, scoring teams. You press, you lead the nation in field goal percentage. Can you talk about why you play the way you play, if it helps you to get where you are right now?**

COACH BILLY DONOVAN: I play that way because, first of all, I believe in it. I like to see the game played in transition. I like to see the ball movement. I like player movement. I like extra passing. I like guys utilizing the game of basketball in terms of trying to teach them how to play the right way.

Believe it or not, our style of play is very, very hard to coach because there is time that I have to give up a level of control and trust. I don't call a play every single time. I try to let our guys make plays. In doing that, you have to work very hard in practice to be able to do that. But I also think the spontaneity, the creativity of playing that way, getting them to understand extra pass, ball movement, open man, I think is a very, very difficult way to guard.

For me as a player, I was a guy at six feet that if the game got caught in halfcourt, I wasn't getting a shot off **Georgetown, Villanova**, those teams. I was able to be more of an effective player with the game being played in transition.

Also I think, too, in this tournament, you have to be able to play different ways because there's sometimes you cannot force your style on somebody. You may have to play halfcourt. The **SEC** championship game, we ended up winning

the game 49-47. We have a style and a system and things that we want to do. But you also have to understand that you got to be able to -- if you're not making shots, you got to be able to defend and rebound, hold teams down to a low shooting percentage.

But a lot of probably what I believe in is what I went through as a player, being around **Coach Pitino**.

**Q. Is there more of a sense of urgency these days when you get this far? You never know which kids are going to leave. You're not necessarily building to anything. Why are you so much better than everybody thought in pre-season?**

COACH BILLY DONOVAN: The first reason we're probably better is when you lose your three leading scorers on paper everybody says, how can they be any better. I think that was the first thing.

Also we had a bunch of guys returning and coming back that really were unproven, nobody knew about. Nobody had really seen them play a whole lot.

We're probably a basketball team that's maybe a little bit more balanced. We've got several guys that can score. We've got guys that can defend and rebound and block shots. We're a team that can play in transition. I think we can guard in the halfcourt. These kids have really -- understand really the importance of being unselfish, being part of a team.

**Q. When a kid *Abukar* transfers out, have you kept up with him? What do you say to a kid like that? Do you take it individual by individual when a kid wants to leave?**

COACH BILLY DONOVAN: I've got great respect for **Mohamed**. I always appreciated how hard he worked while he was at **Florida**. As a matter of fact, I had a chance to email his coach back and forth last week a couple times because there was a great article about **Mohamed**, the year he had. I think the person in the article was talking about what did he think about **Florida** reaching the **Final Four**. Just the comments **Mohamed** made about our program, myself, the guys on the team was very nice.

Sometimes for these kids it really comes down to one thing. The most important thing for all these kids is playing time. I think some kids will

accept not playing as a freshman if they can see a light. I think for **Mohamed**, he was saying, where am I going to fit in and play? I would have loved for **Mohamed** to stay. I think he could have continued to develop into a very good player.

It wasn't a conflict of he and I of personalities. It was more of an issue he wanted to play more. Each kid only has four years to play in college. I think he should have the right to be able to leave if he feels another opportunity out there better for him. It's worked out very well for him. He did a great job at **San Diego State**, had a great year, helped them out tremendously. I'm happy for him as a person and kid because he deserves to have a good college experience being on the floor. I think hopefully maybe his time at **Florida**, maybe I helped prepare him for that. I don't know. Maybe that helped.

**Q. This weekend used to be dominated by seniors, juniors. Why are they able to play so well so early? Does it make the situation a little more volatile with a young team?**

COACH BILLY DONOVAN: It always makes it volatile. You bring up a good point. There are other teams out there in the country that are young. I think that certain young kids can handle the role that they're placed into maybe better than some other young kids. It doesn't mean these young kids that haven't been able to do it will not in time become great players. Sometimes it takes people a little longer to do things. There's other people that figure it out early on, there's other people it takes a little longer to figure it out.

The two teams right now are very young. They've got a couple seniors and a couple older guys. We're probably about as youthful as anybody on a Monday night in the last several years.

**Q. (No microphone.)**

COACH BILLY DONOVAN: Why can they? I think a lot of it goes back to their mentality and makeup, them being able to narrow focus. There's so many distractions when you go through something for the first time. Everybody says, are you enjoying it? Are the guys enjoying it? I don't know if they're enjoying it. We're having fun with it right now. I think they know they have to play games. They're having fun playing.

We're not out downtown **Indianapolis** going to dinner, we're going to go do this, do that.

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We're trying to get prepared. We're trying to get our rest. Some guys can really narrow the focus and the stage, and other guys it takes a little bit longer. I don't know necessarily what the reason for that would be. I don't know if it's maturity. I really don't know what it would be.

**Q. Did you see the defensive potential in this team from day one? There was a play in the George Mason game when Al and Joakim doubled Lewis. Was that a snapshot of the way this team plays defense?**

COACH BILLY DONOVAN: It's interesting you say that because I felt in the middle of this year, right around the beginning of January, I thought our team last year was much, much better defensively, more disciplined, more accountable, more reliable. We had guys like **Al Horford** and **Joakim Noah** jumping around in the lane trying to block shots. What happened would be is they'd leave their man, go over to block a shot, they had no shot at blocking, ball goes over the basket, we had not block-out, layup.

**Corey Brewer** at times, because he's a good steal guy lunging it through passing lanes, getting out, to me we were, I don't want to say undisciplined, but we didn't understand the concept of when to go block shots, when to go for steals. We needed little bit of that. We've gotten better as the season has gone on through watching film of understanding what we can and cannot do defensively.

I think that's one of the things that's impressive about **UCLA** is they're very disciplined, they don't get out of their routine of what they do, they're very reliable for 35 seconds. With our youth I think are moving a little bit more towards that where we've been making it difficult for teams to score through the fact that we got length up in the front court and our back court players have done a pretty good job containing the ball.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you. Coach. Good luck.

COACH BILLY DONOVAN: Thank you.

**FastScripts by ASAP Sports**

**Florida Gators – 04.02.06**

**13**