

# American Athletic Conference Men's Basketball Championship

Friday, March 14, 2025

Fort Worth, Texas, USA

Dickies Arena

## Tulsa Golden Hurricane

## Eric Konkol

## Keaston Willis

## Braeden Carrington

### Postgame Press Conference



North Texas - 77, Tulsa - 59

THE MODERATOR: We'll go ahead and get started with an opening statement from coach and then take questions for the student-athletes.

ERIC KONKOL: Well, congratulations to North Texas on a well-played game. Proud of our guys for the way they came out today. Played a hard-fought game yesterday. They found a way to dig deep into the reserves and play very, very well for the first half of this game defensively.

The second half got away from us. We had a hard time stopping them inside and outside. And of course, going against North Texas we always know that points are hard to come by.

But I also want to mention our three seniors that are done with eligibility, Keaston, Dwon, Ari Seals, so appreciative of their contributions to the program during their career here, and grateful to have that opportunity to be a part of their journey.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

**Q. What were you trying to get out of it in the first half and what did you think worked well to get you to where you were at halftime and early in the second half?**

ERIC KONKOL: I thought our guys played with great energy. I thought they played with great toughness. We were really trying to protect the paint and make it difficult. I thought our shot challenges were really good on the perimeter and that we held them to one shot, for the most part.

Second half just wasn't the case. Again, give credit to North Texas. They were able to find ways to get to the paint, they got to the free-throw line, and they were able to get second chances. Offensively, you don't just outscore them. I mean, there was a stretch where they had scored a number of possessions, and you are just not going to keep going, like, 2-2 or 3-3 with them the way they guard. So that was the challenging part in the second half.

**Q. This game kind of highlighted some of the inconsistencies that you've had during the year. Can you speak to that and why you thought sometimes you had not as consistent an effort as you would want.**

ERIC KONKOL: I think there could be a number of reasons for that. Sometimes that you give some credit to the other team. We had a very inconsistent year when it came to the players available in practice, just the chemistry, the continuity of the things that you're trying to do. But as I told the team in the locker room, I'm very proud of this group for all the adversity that we faced and some of the inconsistency with just availability of players.

These guys could have folded up their tent and said, Hey, I'm good, weeks ago, but we ended up finding a way to play our best basketball for the last two and a half games. So I'm proud of them for that, for sticking with it and keep fighting.

**Q. Especially somebody like Dwon Odom who plays as hard as he did, did you think he was anymore so than someone else negatively impacted by playing back-to-back days?**

ERIC KONKOL: I think this was part of it. We played an event earlier in the season where we played back-to-back days. You have that experience. But it is part of it. North Texas didn't play yesterday. We did. But some ways you can say that there's an advantage to that. You're used to the arena, you've already played a game, you're ready to roll. I thought everybody gave it everything they had today and it just wasn't enough.

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**Q. Braeden, what were you seeing early on, especially in the first three threes that you took, and got fouled a couple different times and made those free throws, and were able to lift the offense early in the first half.**

BRAEDEN CARRINGTON: I just feel like the team always trusts me to shoot the ball. They have all year. Some games it's inconsistent, but tonight I felt like it was just my game. My teammates were finding me, I was getting open looks, and yeah.

**Q. Keaston, from your perspective, kind of what happened in the second half?**

KEASTON WILLIS: I'd say we kind of just got out toughed. We competed in the first half, was playing great defense. We kind of let up in the second half. Giving them second chance points, that's what killed us. Them getting to the free-throw line. Us not taking care of the ball. All those things came together and they went on a huge run that we couldn't necessarily come back from.

**Q. You'll go down as one of the best 3-point shooters in NCAA history. How do you evaluate your career and what is it like to play your last college basketball game?**

KEASTON WILLIS: It's just a testimony to the work that I put in. Was never really given anything, earned it all. It hurts with it being my last game, but I wouldn't want to be anywhere else. I love Coach Konkol, I love the staff, I love my teammates, and I'm truly grateful for my experience here at the University Of Tulsa, and just look forward to the next step.

**Q. After you sit down and let this one go what will be the next thing you do in trying to rebuild the program for next season?**

ERIC KONKOL: There's always an assessment and analytic process to the entire thing. And, of course, the way college basketball or college sports in general works is, yeah, you visit with guys and you talk about their future, our future. But I've always said that this is about recruiting, development, retaining, and it's going to be all of those things. The guys that are back, we're going to spend a lot of time helping them get better in the weight room and skill development this spring. But we also know that we have scholarships available and we got to go out and recruit. It's different than -- the last few years have been different than ever before, so we'll keep progressing in that manner. But our focus tomorrow is on how do we get better. We won a tournament game here, hadn't happened in the last several years, hasn't happened enough. But we feel like there's some things that we can build upon. Certainly a lot of

things we got to get better at, but we're not going to stop.

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