

National Invitation Tournament: Tulsa vs New Mexico

Thursday, April 2, 2026

Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Hinkle Fieldhouse

Tulsa Golden Hurricane

Eric Konkol

Ade Popoola

Tylen Riley

Semifinal Postgame Press Conference



Tulsa 74, New Mexico 69

ERIC KONKOL: That was a tremendous college basketball game, and we knew that New Mexico would be just a ferocious competitor. The amount of problems that they pose: To guard them; they are stingy defensively. All the credit goes to these guys and just the competitive spirit that they had.

We talked pregame about owning the moment and all the little moments in the game, the little plays to be made, the adversity that we would face.

I thought these guys showed great resiliency, and you know, for me, I've said since the summer and certainly they know this in the last several week, this is an awesome group to coach personally, as people, and we wanted to coach them as long as they possibly can and we get to do that now in the final game on Sunday. We're super excited. I'm really proud of these guys for their competitiveness and togetherness today.

Q. Tylen, you went from one point to nine, all of a sudden, eight straight for Tulsa down the stretch. What opened up in those final minutes for you?

TYLEN RILEY: Just staying patient. If things ain't falling for me, I know my teammates, things will fall for them. The bench guys, we have two starting five. I'm not really worried. The points are going to come. The assists are going to come. It's just we keep playing a flow, and I was just the guy with the ball making the shots at the end of the day.

Q. Coach mentioned the resilience it took. In the second half when you guys had stopped making 3s as

much as you were in the first half, how much of a grind was it, and how important was it to show that resilience he was talking about to stay on top?

TYLEN RILEY: Fighting adversity. It was going to hit at some point. This is a really good team. They didn't make it this far for no reason. We faced adversity all season, so that was our practice, for moments like these. Like you prepare for moments like these and when nobody breaks and we're strong, we can face anything.

Q. Your perspective: New Mexico was never able to make that run; what allowed you guys to hold that off and with that resiliency in mind?

ADE POPOOLA: I think we got off to a great start. And when shots weren't falling we little locked in and got some more stops down the stretch, and it worked out.

Q. I want to hear about Tylen and the way that he played tonight. He had offensive boards that gave you those second-chance points.

TYLEN RILEY: I'll start it off. Yeah, those offensive boards were huge. Coach be preaching about getting those extra possessions, fighting for extra possessions and he took his matchup seriously. Anything like that, he's been doing that all NIT, the whole tournament, and he's just been a really big piece. And he's just been doing a really good job at staying consistent and that just helps our team so much, and it's obviously noticeable.

ADE POPOOLA: Offensive rebounds are a big spark for us and I feel like without that, we can have, like, it a small boost and each rebound it matter, each possession matters. And Tylen, he plays so hard and it give us all the spark, and it helped the whole team out.

Q. You guys end up with five players in double figures and you've had this bounce tech all year. What do you think it says about your team that even know New Mexico has the two highest scorers in the game you guys are still the ones that come out with the win?

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ADE POPOOLA: I feel like we share the ball, and if it ain't going in for me or if it ain't going in, it's going to go in for somebody else. We going to get stops and the ball to go to find somebody. And if it miss, Tylen going to rebound. We all going to crash and try to kick it out, and it eventually will fall, and the stops will help it.

TYLEN RILEY: Credit to the coaching staff for the recruitment and just having a really good team. If the starting five isn't doing it, we have a second starting five that will do it. I just felt like we had no weaknesses.

Q. Now you're going to be for three more days be in the middle of the Final Four city and you're also going to be one of the last teams playing basketball this season. How much are you looking forward for not just a chance to win a championship but being a part of everything going on here in the next few days?

ADE POPOOLA: I feel like it's an honor to be playing this late, and I feel like we going to enjoy this win but we going to get right back to whoever wins this game, scouting and preparing for the next. But it's an honor to keep playing.

TYLEN RILEY: Yeah, exactly. And like Coach said, we want to keep this group playing basketball for a long time, and we're just fighting for that, whether it's -- we've been down, whether it's we went to overtime, like we just going to stay connected, keep fighting and just keep having each other's back.

It's just an honor to play this late, especially being one of those teams. I think it's going to be like four teams left in the whole world playing. Yeah, that's just an honor for sure.

Q. Seven block, seven steals. You talked kind of how physical it was down the stretch. How gratifying was it to see your team respond to the challenge in that way?

ERIC KONKOL: You know, the conversations in the huddle says a lot about this group because there were some moments, we had a frustrating stretch, and credit New Mexico, but we turned the basketball over and just playing sloppy. But at the same time, they were changing in a way and opening up some things that looked available and weren't.

But I was really, really proud of the guys and their conversations because they wanted this so badly. This is one of the most competitive groups I've ever been around. But they have become very close, and the way they were talking to one another, it was so solution driven, so I'm really proud.

You have games that you shoot the basketball well, and we did in moments. But this is the type of win, this is the type of games, now in April, you've got to be able to have that type of resiliency collectively to get these wins.

Q. Yesterday you said you couldn't come out with a C effort or B minus effort; what do you grade tonight?

ERIC KONKOL: I thought our effort was certainly an A. Our execution was not. We can always find things to nitpick and get better at but these guys really wanted it. We talked about emptying your tank, like really just letting it all out there. We had one guy turn an ankle and another guy was bleeding in the huddle and so they did not flinch. From an effort standpoint, really proud of our guys.

Q. What's your perspective on having that struggling first half to that final minute? It was any guy could score and then Tylen came in for the free throw at the end.

ERIC KONKOL: Well, Tylen leads us by far in getting to the free throw line. He is our greatest threat attacking the basket. The way New Mexico's defense is structured, is they are elite at protecting the paint. So he showed great discipline early, especially, the way they were guarding him and the way that he was getting other guys involved.

They gave him a couple mid-range jumpshots. Some of those they made at a pretty high rate, just couldn't get it falling tonight.

What was really good and impressive for him is when they were in foul situations, he was ready to be fouled. He protected the basketball, and he got to the line and knocked it down.

Q. You have a situation that no coach has ever had: You have a team going for an NIT Championship, four blocks down the street from where the Final Four is going on, the semifinals. And I know you just won, so you probably haven't thought a lot about this, but how do you want them to take part in this and enjoy the whole furor going around but also be focused on Sunday night?

ERIC KONKOL: I have thought a lot about it, actually. This is awesome. And I've told the guys this from the -- right after we won our last game to advance to here. I've been giving them a count for probably three weeks about how many teams are playing and us being one of them. I think it started out where we were one of 86 and just how that keeps dropping, and how very selfishly I want to coach these guys as long as I possibly can.



To do it in the place where the DII and DIII championship are; I played Division III. We played in the National Championship in Salem Virginia. But for all to be right here and for us to be a part of it, it's never happened, and it is awesome to be a part of.

I've been to -- I can't tell you how many Final Fours, but this is my fourth time being in Indy, and it's one of the best. And I am so happy that these guys get to experience it. We want to win. We want to play at the highest level. But I want these guys to have great memories being a Tulsa basketball player. They will never for get this.

Q. This is a question, might not make sense to anybody except you and I in this room, but any chance you wear a bow tie for the Championship on Sunday?

ERIC KONKOL: No chance. I'll let my brother wear his bow tie. And this bow tie must have been good luck. It was great to see him here in his state of Indiana now, very, very proud of my brother. Thank you.

For those of you that don't know, my brother just became the president of Valparaiso University, and he's two years younger than me. We were high school basketball players together. He played college. Big, big basketball fan.

Q. I'll ask you the same question I asked them. Just the balance that you guys displayed scoring-wise, what do you think it says about your team that all five of those guys can finish in double figures almost everybody who played scored at some point?

ERIC KONKOL: I think it's a great credit, and it's nice that Tylen said it. It's a great credit to our assistant coaches in the way that they evaluated guys that would fit together with a lot of versatility. We had ten guys play, almost all ten touched double figures.

I thought our bench was huge tonight. They gave us a list energy wise. I thought we wore on New Mexico a little bit. Our bench, not only scored points, but I thought that their effort in the number of things that they contributed was really important. We've had -- we've got four guys that average double figures. But to have five; Jaylen gets ten off the bench. We've had injuries, we've had foul trouble, but we've had contributions consistently from these ten guys all season, and it's been that way. And they delivered in a big stage tonight.

Q. Any reflection on 30 wins and what this team has done to move the program forward in your tenure?

ERIC KONKOL: Yeah, not much reflection. I think that

takes a little bit of time. You know, we've been in the moment. We're trying to own the moment as a staff and as a program.

I do know this: This has been such an enjoyable group, and not just through the wins but the valleys, too. The adversity. And you know, we have a vision for what Tulsa basketball can be consistently. This is a great step, and of course our focus is getting treatment and getting some rest, figuring out who we play next and trying to finish this season with a win because very few teams get to do that. And that is the best.

And I would love nothing more than for this team, for our university, for our people back at home in Tulsa to experience it with us.

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