

# National Invitation Tournament

Thursday, March 31, 2016

New York, New York



**Mike Lonergan**

**Joe McDonald**

**Patricio Garino**

**Tyler Cavanaugh**

**Kevin Larsen**

George Washington

George Washington - 74, Valparaiso - 60

COACH LONERGAN: We couldn't be happier to win this NIT Championship. Extremely happy, especially for our, I hate to say always the seniors. This class has been great. But Tyler, all our guys, even our subs tonight, had great minutes.

These guys, I wanted to leave a legacy. We didn't make the NCAAs and we are all heartbroken and it's hard to bounce back but they bounce back. Every team we played including Hofstra was tough, and we got better each game. We played our best basketball end of March. I told them I wanted, instead of senior night, I wanted it to be senior month. And that's what it was. And Tyler stepped up his game even more, double figures every game this year.

Happy for them. Happy to be here. Appreciate the committee selecting us, and that's it.

**Q. Can you tell us a little bit about the program that you arrived into, what your goals were then and how close you feel like you've come to meeting them with a 28-win season and an NIT title?**

JOE McDONALD: I think when I first got here, it was kind of in the rebuilding stages. I knew that. And we had a strong class coming with these two guys here next to me. Honestly we just wanted to change the culture and get back to winning basketball at GW.

I think after that first -- our freshman year was kind of rough, but each year I think we learned something new and we kept growing and we got better each year and we accomplished new things every year. Made new memories every year that we're very proud of.

To leave the NIT Championship winners is so special. Play like 37, 38 games and there's not a lot of teams that can have their final game for a championship, and

we're just as proud that it's in this stage and we're happy that it ended this way for us.

**Q. Tyler, you're one of the few people coming back next year. Can you describe the motivation that you are going to next year to get to the NCAA Tournament maybe?**

TYLER CAVANAUGH: Yeah, I mean, obviously it's going to be a completely different team, losing these three guys. It's been a blessing to play with them. I mean, it's just been great.

But we've got good players who will step up and I'm not really worried about that now. But I'm excited. NCAAs is always the goal but we proved this year that you can make a lot of memories in this great tournament. So I'm just excited to celebrate with these guys.

**Q. You guys had a great second half. Numbers are pretty good from downtown and also from the field. Just what happened and did you guys feel more comfortable in the second half?**

PATRICIO GARINO: I think we're feeling comfortable this whole tournament. I think our defense is clicking. We feel very comfortable and confident, and I think that's what led us to feel even better offensively.

I think we have a lot of tools, a lot of personnel to attack offensively, but some of the major keys that set us back before was our defense, and now being focused and learning the personnel, that's when it helped us.

Now is when the experience paid off. I think the second half; that we had three years behind us and so many games before, I think we were calm the whole time and just confident in our games.

JOE McDONALD: Like Coach said earlier, our basketball got better as the tournament went on, and like Patricio said, it started with the defense, on the defensive end for that second half. We didn't out in transition. We got easy buckets and I think our zone really bothered them in the second half. Made them shoot a lot of jumpers, and getting that rebound and pushing the ball. And we took care of the basketball, as well, so that always helps.

KEVIN LARSEN: The defense definitely made the key

for the second half. Like when we focused on defense, I think we can beat anybody, and when people don't score on you, it gives you less pressure to score on the other end and I felt like that helped us a lot in the second half.

TYLER CAVANAUGH: Just to build off what they said, our zone was really good this weekend. We played two very good teams, and we beat them pretty handily, and that's just a testament to us as a team and our hard work and our coaches putting us in the right position to win.

**Q. Tyler, can you talk about your decision, what led to your decision to transfer to George Washington?**

TYLER CAVANAUGH: This guy. He had been recruiting me since my freshman year, and he was one of the first coaches that offered me a scholarship. So there was a trust there and even with him and I remember Coach Turner following me around at tournaments when I was in ninth grade.

And to play with these guys, I mean, this is what I envisioned. You of course envision going to the NCAAs but to win a championship is great, and send these guys off with a win, couldn't ask for anything better.

**Q. Every year teams get slighted from the NCAAs and they seem to lose in the first round of the NIT. What made this team special to survive this run and stick together for so long?**

TYLER CAVANAUGH: It was tough but we knew we kind of shot ourselves in the foot a few times in the regular season losing to some teams. But we got through that Hofstra game, they are a great team, and once Alex hit that shot to win, I think we were re-energized, refocused and we just knew we had a mission to accomplish and we did that tonight. And it's just great.

**Q. For anyone. Just on the lighter side of things, President Obama lives in your neighborhood. Do you think he was rooting for you tonight? I don't want to suggest anything, but maybe a positive White House visit?**

PATRICIO GARINO: That would be awesome for me personally. (Laughter)

**Q. This is for everybody. Could you describe what the atmosphere was like playing in the Garden, championship game and you seemed to travel well with the fan base. Could you describe what that was like being on the court?**

PATRICIO GARINO: I think every time we travel to either New York or Brooklyn, we have a very strong fan base. We feel like at home and that gives an

advantage. I think we have to thank all the alumni, all the fans that travel from D.C. with the buses, I think it gave us an advantage, and the confidence that we have people supporting us and knowing that we have more people than anybody feels really good and gives us that confidence.

**Q. How big an overall win is this for the program?**

COACH LONERGAN: It's huge for us, it really is. I won't say it was a five-year plan, nobody is more patient -- less patient than me, except maybe my dad. My kids say, he can't be a doctor because he had no patience. Bad joke but it's true.

So NCAA, a lot of people lose NIT and say, oh, they didn't want to be -- I've never believed that. We're an up-and-coming program that has great history. We were down. We had a change of culture when we got here five years ago, guys like Isaiah Armwood and John Kopriva, want to mention them, helped us change.

And then this first recruiting class. Their first year, might have been 13-17, but we lost one-possession games to some of the best teams in the country and I knew we would be good after that. We stuck with them and they believed in what I was selling.

To add Tyler Cavanaugh, who I recruited as hard as anybody I ever recruited, and we were first Division I offer when I was at Vermont, and I got the GW job, got back in, he ended up going to Wake Forest. Where our program was, I couldn't really blame him.

But didn't burn any bridges. I had a good relationship with his players, his dad was a great player at Hamilton College. For him, I sold him on, you could be the final piece of taking this team, which I thought this team could go to the Sweet 16 if we could make the tournament. The hardest thing was to get in, nobody talks about us, I thought we were a bubble team. We beat St. Joe's; I thought we should have went.

But the Atlantic 10 is a great league. It doesn't get enough respect, it really doesn't. It has a great commissioner and great teams, and hopefully this will help the Atlantic 10 as much as GW.

So this is a big deal for our university, our players and our program, and I'm proud of these guys that helped put our program back on the map but we are not where we want to be yet. We want to keep this thing growing.

**Q. You're obviously building something good, NIT champions now, you bring back Cavanaugh and Yuta. Can you build on this next year?**

COACH LONERGAN: I hope so. We have a young man sitting out, Jaren Sina, he was here tonight, pretty

good player, all-rookie team in the BIG EAST a couple years ago. I think our program is a great fit for him. I think he'll have a terrific year next year. So I think we have three guys that have proven they can play at this level.

Young man, Jordan Roland, think he will make a big jump. He played very well tonight. Hard to get him minutes behind Garino and Joe and some of these guys.

So I think a couple young guys will pick things up. On paper, we have one of maybe my best recruiting classes I've ever had, so hopefully that will turn out. I think Tyler can be a conference-player-type year player next year. I think Yuta, he's showing signs and I think he'll make a big, big jump next year.

We have to keep increasing the talent level but sometimes when you win, the culture of winning is there and that was the case at Vermont when I took the job. They graduated everybody when Tom Brennan retired, but they were used to winning and now our kids have tasted this and hopefully guys like Paul Jorgensen and these guys will work extra hard in the off-season.

We are going to miss these guys, no doubt about it, but I think this will help us attract more quality student athletes to GW.

**Q. You're wearing the Championship net now. What happens to the good luck net?**

COACH LONERGAN: I'll probably send that back to my buddy who accepted it to me. Two years ago I wore a net St. Paddy's day, one of the great days of my life, Catholic-U won the National Championship, cut a lot of nets down there. And Vermont, we won the American East one time, but we haven't cut any nets down since I've been at GW.

When we didn't get in the NCAAs -- really when we didn't win the A-10, it was really for the A-10 tournament, we kept that net and kept it hanging in the locker room and it was in the locker room tonight. And I'm not a big motivation guy, but I tell you, I felt that net before every game, and I told those guys, we win, I'm wearing one of those nets. I don't care what we do with the other one.

**Q. How does your small college background keep these guys focused and prepared for a tournament like this?**

COACH LONERGAN: I think they know how hungry I am, and opportunity -- life is about opportunities and took me a long time to get a Division I opportunity. You know, I was very selective in every job I took. I loved Catholic-U, I didn't want to leave there but didn't want

to look back and not take a chance. Vermont, I didn't really want to leave, I wanted a ten-year deal if I was going to stay for no raise and they didn't really want to do that and that was fine.

But always wanted to get back in the area. Most of my family lives in Maryland, my dad is here tonight. And a lot of people don't want to visit University of Vermont. It was a good move. I'm still a Vermont fan. It was a good move for me. I always want to work at a high academic school where I felt we could play at the highest level of college basketball.

I always say I am a little D-III guy from Bowie kind of living the dream. But I think our guys know how hungry I am and a guy like Matt Hart, he's a D-III guy that transferred and I said, hey, who is going to give you a better opportunity than a D-III guy like me. He's going to make a jump next year as well. I think there's great coaches in Division III and high school. I looked down the other night, it's unbelievable, Steve Fisher down there, I wanted to ask for his autograph.

That's fun for me. I mean, it really is. It's fun for me to go against these guys that are famous and everything. You know, I owe it all to our players and I've got a great staff that's helped our program really get where it is.

**Q. Just in terms of the game, the second half, out scoring them 44-29, how much of a statement was that in you guys putting that game away?**

COACH LONERGAN: I think it was key for us. Kevin was struggling earlier, big kid is a heck of a shot-blocker and he changed shots. We were going in there, told him, drive it, get it off and we get the rebound but we couldn't finish. We were a little bit nervous, whatever it was.

But I thought the second half Kevin went off him more and we got him in foul trouble. Did a terrible job on Peters early. He scored early and we didn't make life tough for him and then we put Garino on him the second half. Then the 1-3-1, which is my favorite defense, we just haven't been good at this year because we haven't played with enough energy, that really helped us throughout the NIT.

Never thought I would say it: I thought this defense actually won this championship. Started with Monmouth, the job that Yuta Watanabe did against Robinson, their low guard who is a terrific player. And that night I just said, hey, we really have it and we can win this thing. We got better every game which is nice.

**Q. What was the key to the zone the past two games?**

COACH LONERGAN: I think energy. This is my best offensive team I've ever really had. And when you

have kids been scoring their whole life, they don't really like to play defense a lot of times. And so they don't like to grind it out, and it's only natural.

So I just struggled to get this team to really -- I won't say, buy in. They weren't like, hey, we're not going to guard. But we were bad defensively. We were beating St. Joe's by 14 at halftime and they were shooting 58 percent from the field. So I knew -- we made 11 threes in the A-10 tournament.

So I knew we were in a tough situation. We didn't start guarding, we just couldn't do it and Tyler fouled out with five minutes left and our lack of depth hurt us.

But we guarded and we had just so much more energy. Watanabe and Garino always have the energy but other guys started really caring about defense and believing that defense wins championships, because it's definitely, definitely true. Our defense picked up so much lately.