

# NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: First Four

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Dayton, Ohio, USA

UD Arena

## Lehigh Mountain Hawks

## Coach Brett Reed

## Hank Alvey

## Nasir Whitlock

### Media Conference



We played in Dayton last year. We kind of had a good game with them. It was good. Atmosphere was crazy, so definitely one of the better atmospheres I've been in in my college career, so we were excited to play here.

HANK ALVEY: Yeah, I would agree with that. Last year it was pretty cool seeing everybody, seeing the atmosphere. Being here before definitely helps going into this game. But we're just going to treat it like a normal game, at the same time. But it helps to be familiar with the environment.

**Q. Nasir, I'm assuming you've probably been asked this a bunch, but to be honest but know that shot was going in when you let it fly against Holy Cross?**

NASIR WHITLOCK: No, I did not, honestly. I've told Hank, all my teammates, I didn't know it was going in, so thanking God it went in.

Honestly, God put his hands on that ball and I'll take a win. But yeah, I didn't know it was going in.

**Q. Hank, what's your favorite March Madness moment?**

HANK ALVEY: I would say just because we're at Lehigh, CJ McCollum taking down Duke. It was 2012, I think. That's always a favorite, watching Jenkins hit that shot. I don't know when that was.

That was pretty cool, too. I remember watching that when I was a kid. That was pretty electric.

NASIR WHITLOCK: I think watching Trey Burke in March Madness. He was a small guard. He wore No. 3. That's the number I wore until I got to Lehigh.

It's retired of course because of CJ. Watching him be able to do what he did at Michigan was cool. I think he had a great game against Kansas. Just watching him making his run when I was a kid kind of made me want to play in March Madness, so yeah.

**Q. Did either of you guys know anything about Dayton before Sunday?**

NASIR WHITLOCK: Yeah, we played at Dayton last year.

**Q. Hank, talking about the run that you guys have been on, has there been something in particular that's clicked with this unit?**

HANK ALVEY: Yeah, I think just the reaffirmation that it's us, it's always been us. The only people we need to worry about are the people in the room, in the locker room. Going down the stretch in the postseason, we just knew it was about us.

It was going to take all of us together, but at the same time, everybody is just stepping up individually has taken this team to the next level, I feel like.

NASIR WHITLOCK: Yeah, I think to second everything Hank said, we came together more as a team.

I think we started conference play 0-2 and we kind of got our 4 man back so it took us a little bit to gel. So we lost both of those games, but we came together and made a conscious effort.

I think we had to come together and just play harder and put more urgency on all possessions and trying to focus in at the end.

I think our team bonding over the summer and over the spring and since the season ended, it definitely got us through some hard times. I think every game since Christmas break has been decided by one possession or something like that, between five points for sure.

The games are going to be close and you've got to be together in those moments because basketball is a game of runs and there's ups and downs but we stayed together but we're rooted in God, we're rooted in Christ, so definitely



helped us.

**Q. You were both with the Mountain Hawks last year. What would you say is the biggest difference from last year to this year?**

NASIR WHITLOCK: I think last year we were a little bit younger. Hank was starting as a freshman. We had a sophomore. We had a lot of young people. I think Ed was also starting as a freshman most of the season. I think coming into this summer, I told the team we've got to learn how to win.

We won a lot of close games this year. A lot of those games we were losing last year, just coming down to the final two, three minutes, the last media of the game.

I think we figured out how to win a little bit more which helped us win those close games because in our league every game is going to be close no matter if you're home or away, so yeah.

HANK ALVEY: I would agree with that. We were definitely younger last year. You could say we're still young right now. But being here now in my second year, just that experience of that first year has helped a lot.

I feel like Nas has really stepped up as a leader this year. Not saying we didn't have leaders last year. We had great leaders last year, but Nas has taken on that leadership role and leading us to where we are now.

I want to shout out him for making a big impact on the team this year.

**Q. Hank, when is Lehigh playing their best basketball?**

HANK ALVEY: When we're sharing it. That's what I've said all year. We've got a lot of weapons on the team. Any guy can go out there, score 15 points a night. I think that's very crucial for good teams to have multiple guys who can score and be a threat.

That's when we're playing our best basketball, when we're sharing it and getting other guys open looks.

NASIR WHITLOCK: Yeah, that's a good question. I think we're playing our best basketball the second, again, what he said, we're on the same page being unselfish. For us it comes down to defense, so when we're getting stops and finishing with a rebound I think that allows us to play faster and play in transition instead of facing halftime court defense and letting people score on us.

But, yeah, we we're all being unselfish, when we're playing

together and playing hard, I think that's when we play our best basketball.

**Q. Hank provides a really nice complement to your game and your leadership. Is there something in particular that you worked on off-season or something that you changed in your game looking to sort of become a leader on this Lehigh squad?**

NASIR WHITLOCK: Yeah, I would say just trying to be more vocal, be more verbal. Everybody needs different things on the team, so I've got to make a decision. I try to encompass everybody and the I just think about myself.

Yeah, I think you always can be more vocal and just be more confident being a leader because every decision you make is probably not going to benefit everybody or make everybody feel happy.

So just being okay with that sometimes but also trying to get it into the guys and feel like I'm close with every one of them. I feel like I've done that with them and I have a close and personal relationship with everybody on the team, unique relationship. That's brought us together.

And then off the court activities, whether it's playing spades, whether it's going on retreats and stuff, we definitely think that's helped us as a team this year.

**Q. Who's the best spades player on the team?**

NASIR WHITLOCK: Hank. Tell 'em, Hank.

HANK ALVEY: Nas will say him, but...

NASIR WHITLOCK: Who you going to say?

HANK ALVEY: Me.

NASIR WHITLOCK: Oh my God.

HANK ALVEY: But off the record, yeah.

NASIR WHITLOCK: You don't believe that.

HANK ALVEY: It's one and two right here.

NASIR WHITLOCK: I'll give him that. 1A and 1B.

**Q. Hank, can you talk about your upbringing in the small town Illinois cornfields to your journey here on the biggest stage in college sports?**

HANK ALVEY: Yeah, it's been really incredible. I never thought I'd be here, growing up in a small town of like 900

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people; then moving to Bethlehem which is a little bigger, like 70,000. That's considered small for some people. It's pretty big for me.

It's just been really cool seeing where basketball has taken me.

And then just being here now, it's really surreal. I've said that before. But it's -- sometimes I still can't believe it. Like sitting here right now is pretty cool. I never thought I'd be here.

**Q. Can you guys talk a little bit about how you've been received here in Dayton? Hopefully good.**

HANK ALVEY: Yeah, it's been great. When we arrived at the hotel they rolled out a red carpet for us. People were cheering. That was pretty cool, as well.

Police escort coming here. I've never seen that. Running through red lights. The hospitality has been great.

NASIR WHITLOCK: Yeah, I mean, seconding everything Hank said. It's been good. Like he said, red carpet when we get there. I mean, you've got a plane full off from the athletic director, from the band, to the cheerleaders.

We've never had things like that. I know some other colleges have, but things like that is amazing. And just seeing everybody support you, that they all can be there, it's good.

**Q. What is you guys' approach and improvements that you guys are working on as I know you don't have the best record on the road.**

NASIR WHITLOCK: I would say probably just trying to be ourselves. We're on a neutral floor here, so I think we played neutral floor in Vegas and we went 1-1 in Vegas.

We've got to bring our own energy. Obviously we played at home throughout the whole Patriot League tournament which was great atmosphere, and even a couple games before that we were at home.

So we've just got to bring our own energy, not rely on the crowd and be us. Not let the stage, who we're playing, whatever. We've just got to be ourselves regardless.

HANK ALVEY: I would say confidence, as well. Starting the season, yeah, we didn't start off great, but we're here now because of what we've done from that point.

Being confident in that and being confident in the preparation that we've done to get here, we've kept that in

the forefront of our mind, especially being here now. We've been in these moments. We've been in Dayton before. We've played on this court.

Knowing that we can be comfortable with that is reassuring.

**Q. Is there a moment from the season that stands out to you when you realized you could get to this point?**

HANK ALVEY: I would say first comes to mind is Nasir's shot in the quarterfinals of the Patriot League just because it was so big. There was a lot of coverage on that.

But other than that, it's just seeing -- there's a ton of moments from this season where Nas has hit big shots at the end of the games, so he's like the backbone of this team, and I feel like that's really been the key to the season is him and what he does for the program.

NASIR WHITLOCK: Shout-out Hank, but obviously me and Hank up here -- I want to get out the way, MVP of the team Josh Ingram is not here, but he does everything. Him, Hank and Josh are the most unselfish teammates I've ever played with going back to middle school and high school. They allow me to shine sometimes when really it's other players.

Yeah, I've always prayed that we would end up here, but I think one time we were playing spades and it was a great game and I was just like, this team is really connected. We've really got a chance.

Then I think when we started 0-2, and then in practice we didn't go back. We kind of went up, we turned up the intensity, we had players in practice ready to go at each other like it was life or death.

Once I seen that, that there was no quit in this team, I've seen crazy things in the Patriot League tournament, anybody can beat anybody. I always like us against anybody, but I would say sighing that off court connection along with the fight we have and not giving up, that's what I seen and I'm praying about it. If God wants it to happen, nothing will stop it.

**Q. Your coach has a lot of experience. What has he told you about this stage and being here in the NCAA tournament and March Madness?**

NASIR WHITLOCK: I mean, obviously had the crazy upset, but he just told us it's a blessing to be here. We've got to enjoy the moment.

But we're also coming to here win. We want to win the

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game, win the play-in, and go as far as we can. That's the goal. He told us enjoy the moment, but be humble and hungry and not be content just to get here.

HANK ALVEY: Yeah, he told us just take it for what it is. Don't make it bigger than what it is at the same time, too, which is -- it helps me mentally just knowing that it's just another basketball game, at the end of the day.

It's on a big stage. It's basketball. Just taking it for what it is has been the key.

**Q. Have you guys been able to watch any film on Prairie View A&M? And if you have, what do you see from the Panthers?**

HANK ALVEY: I would say, yeah, we have watched film. They're aggressive on defense. They like to run the court, play at a fast pace. I think they're like top 20 in the nation in pace of play.

It's going to be a quick game, but I feel like if we don't let that affect our game, then we'll be all right.

**Q. Nasir, what have you seen from the Panthers?**

NASIR WHITLOCK: Like Hank said, we have watched them. I think they're a good team. They're rolling right now, so we've got to come ready to play.

**Q. What are you looking forward to most tomorrow night when that ball goes in the air and you're there in March Madness?**

NASIR WHITLOCK: I think I'm looking forward to just playing with my brothers, everything we worked for. I think this is our first time -- yeah, it's everybody on the team's first time in the tournament, so going out there and playing with my brothers.

This is what we worked for, to be in this moment, winning the Patriot League Championship and then go to March Madness. Just tried to tell the guys have fun, this is what we worked for.

We did the spring, conditioning all throughout the season playing 30 something games and this is what we're worked for. We're just going to have fun. Yeah, going out there and battling with my brothers.

HANK ALVEY: I would say the same thing. Just going out there with the guys you've been around for the past two years for me, three years for Nas. Just going out there knowing that they have my back and I've got theirs is what I'm going to look forward to the most as well as just looking

up -- got some people coming out from Illinois. So just looking up in the crowd and seeing them, hopefully, that's what I'm looking forward to.

**Q. How many folks coming through?**

HANK ALVEY: I would say 15 at least, 20.

**Q. Coach, just a statement from your group and what they've been able to accomplish here as a championship in the Patriot League.**

BRETT REED: Yeah, I couldn't be more proud of our student-athletes and our coaching staff. They really pulled together and they decided to have tremendous unity this year. We were a group of people who were all the heading in the same direction. There wasn't any dissension. Our players allowed our coaches to coach them. They trusted what we were doing. Our coaching staff remained together.

I thought we had a chance early in the season to be a top-3 team. When I saw us deal with early-season injuries where it essentially wiped out an entire position within our roster and we had to go with patchwork type of lineups. And we started the season 4-11, but our guys were unified and still continued to trust us with what we were doing, I thought we had the makings of doing something special.

Since that point, we have continued to excel and continued to grow.

**Q. Of course, I asked you this last game, but what does it mean for you to be here with your son Brendan?**

BRETT REED: Thank you very much. I appreciate it. It's been a special story for me. I've told other people this. My story is not better, it's not worse, it's just different than most people in college basketball. There's a lot of people who move from job to job.

Fortunately our program has had a lot of success, and there's been opportunities. If I wanted to pursue them, to do other things at other places and bring what I believe is kind of a championship formula to a college basketball program.

But through that, I always put a priority on my wife Kendra and my children. The reason I say my story is a little bit different is my kids have grown up in the same community their entire life. They've gone to the same school districts; they're living in the same house.

Because of that, I've been able to as a father provide great

stability. I've also found a place that is really special because there's great alignment with what I believe in in the way we can develop young people for the future, because Lehigh is one of the best academic institutions in the country.

As far as sharing it with Brendan, it's uniquely special because of that priority I put on being a dad. I had the opportunity as a young kid to share basketball with my father, who was a very successful coach in the state of Michigan, both at the high school and junior college level, where he actually won a National Championship.

I was on the court when they cut down the nets, and I just remember being in the same environment. I was on the floor before I was too young, pushing little hot wheels cars on the wood floor, getting locked in lockers, doing all that type of stuff.

Throughout the course of my coaching career at Lehigh my family has been able to be engaged. Brendan was that kid who was around. Brendan was that kid that all of our players were like big brothers to. I know he bleeds brown. I know he loves it.

To give him the chance to have that experience along with our other guys but also be able to share some special moments and championships, these are going to be some memories that we'll never forget.

**Q. There was a cool moment last year, your group was able to play in this building and Anthony Grant, the head coach of the University of Dayton, his son is also on the team, so it was that matchup that you alluded to. The question, do you think there's a benefit in playing in this building? I know Nasir and Hank alluded to it, what they were able to experience a year ago.**

BRETT REED: Yeah, this is a wonderful facility. I mean, it is fantastic. The support from the community here in Dayton is incredible.

We're actually really looking forward to this game because we know what it means to this community. We know the type of support that's going to be there.

Now, our guys could sense that when at the came out and played last year at the University of Dayton. I think they've been accustomed to environments that are big stages, and Dayton is one of them.

Having the chance to have played here before and having a small sense of familiarity certainly can be an advantage.

**Q. When is Lehigh basketball at its best?**

BRETT REED: We're at our best really playing out of skill and feel. I give our guys a lot of responsibility and I give them a lot of freedom out on the court. I trust them to be able to make plays. I was never the type of coach, even as a player, that I wanted to be looking over my shoulder and running set plays all the time.

We want to teach guys how to play. We want them to trust their talent. We want them to push forward, make reads of situations, but above all, we really want them to play with tremendous unity.

When you have skill in multiple positions, when you have a high feel for the game, a lot of that sharing the basketball and playing each other, making each other great is what can take place.

I think when you look at a Lehigh-coached team, you're going to see a team that has a lot of grit, a lot of togetherness, but they're also going to be able to make some really good basketball plays because they're relying on each other and they've built an incredible connectedness out on the court, which comes from intentional relationship building within our program by everybody who's involved in it.

**Q. I was wondering, we get a lot of repeats here actually, especially a couple of leagues that send the same teams over and over again, but you guys hadn't been here in the First Four before. What are the pros and cons of being here versus being in the field of 64 to begin with?**

BRETT REED: Well, I think it's a great opportunity to potentially go against another championship-level team and continue to see what you're made of. This is a great experience and a great chance for our guys, not only to showcase their talent on a national stage, but you've got an opportunity to go head to head almost as if it's a Patriot League championship type game with another team that's playing some great basketball.

I've been in this environment, and fortunately for me, we've had experiences where we've orchestrated some magical upsets. But a lot of times, you're a major underdog. This is going to be a dogfight. When you have a chance to test yourself against some of the best, now it breaks through all those jitters. It breaks through everything.

Hopefully we can be fortunate enough to advance, but we know that we're going to have to play an excellent game, and when you have that type of battle-tested experience that we have, you embrace that competition.

Sometimes our guys must think I'm crazy because we'll go into games, we'll be in late parts of games, and I'm just as excited as can be. I'm the ultimate competitor. I love this stuff.

I think we led the country in overtime games this year, and there's so many times we're going into it, like guys, this is awesome, let's go. Our guys are almost, like, oh, my gosh, we've got to continue playing. I'm like, yeah, we get to continue to play; let's go.

I just love the moment, and I love the chance to compete. There's so many other things that I could be doing, but being able to compete against some of the best with people that you care about and love, it doesn't get any better than that.

**Q. You mentioned those magical upsets that this program has had. Obviously the win against Duke. Do you see any similarities between this team and that team from 2012?**

BRETT REED: Well, that was a special team. I obviously want to keep the focus on this year's team. It doesn't hurt to look in the rear view mirror, but we've got to look through the windshield that's in front of us and the opportunities that we have.

If I were to draw some parallels, this is what I would draw. Number one, these guys believe in themselves and they believe in each other. There's an unbelievable bond that's taking place with these young people.

If you look at the climate and complexion of college basketball, a lot of times people are in the door and out the door. Yeah, they might be playing for that team for that season, but these guys are convicted about Lehigh and they're committed to each other.

I think we might have been, if not the number one or number two team in the entire country as far as roster continuity.

Now, these guys are talented. Everybody can see that. They could go play a lot of different places. But they believe in an unbelievable degree that Lehigh can provide for them as an anchor. They know that they've loved by coaches and other people, and they have a connectedness as a family, as a basketball unit that's incredible.

The same thing could be said for that 2012 team. But we also have some terrific players. We had people who could lead us then, and we have people who can lead us now. Up in this press area, Nasir Whitlock was here, and he is a

phenomenal clutch player. It's been impressive to watch him grow.

He was an exceptional player coming out of high school, but he had that same coachable nature that CJ McCollum had. CJ was thirsty to get better. Nasir has been thirsty to get better. It wasn't just instant coffee and Nas got everything he wanted right away. He could always score but he added to his game year after year and became the complete player that he is now.

I think that's super impressive.

To be able to see somebody who's earned his stripes, leads with incredible credibility because he's been through it, and he was so bought into what we're trying to do is a similar theme and a similar model to what we've seen with other teams that believe in themselves. They love each other, they play with great interconnectedness, they trust coaching, and they're willing to grow through all the experiences, and that's what we have here this year.

**Q. Junior college basketball in the state of Michigan is highly underrated with both MOT and Oakland Community College having great programs. Anything you took from your father as an assistant coach there that you used to build Lehigh's program?**

BRETT REED: It was probably one of the most critical foundational things that I've ever done as a coach. I was in the gym with my dad and I learned what we did as a basketball player. My lens as a player and as a coach, even today, is based on the experiences of my dad Lynn Reed. I thought he was the best basketball coach in the entire country. I still do.

But when I had a chance to coach with him, it was one of the most foundational pieces for me professionally because not only did I learn what to do, but I also learned perhaps the most important thing that most people don't understand: Why he did what he did. Because I had the chance to see it full circle.

He was somebody that played maybe a little bit of a different style, but I would be comfortable with that, too. I think in the national semifinal game they might have won 142 to 138 in double overtime because they pressed, they ran, they did all that type of stuff.

So I've had a chance to have incredible exposure to unbelievable aspects of coaching, but maybe the most important thing is I had an incredible model as a dad and also somebody who was going to pour into people and help them grow.

I'll kind of end with this for that question: It's not just the X's and O's. My parents still live in the same house I grew up in, and as a kid, the number of players that would come back and sit down with my mom and my dad and tell them what they're doing in their lives, show them pictures of their family, I can't tell you how many times I heard this.

To my dad, they would say, Coach, I don't know where I would be in my life if it wasn't for basketball and staying for you at that stage. As a kid, to hear that, like all this winning stuff is cool and I love it. Fortunately our program has been really strong.

But when you have an opportunity to influence the lives the people around you through the game of basketball, that's the greatest reward.

So you're right; basketball at the junior college level in this area is really strong. I saw incredible battles with great programs, but I also had a chance to see an incredible model in my dad who figured out a way to bring people together and actually to some degree in what could be a world where rosters change all the time, he was doing that consistently.

I grew up with that. I think even with that story, if our faces are new, there's a way in which to develop a deep unified team, and that's through those trusting and authentic relationships.

**Q. I was going to ask along those lines, being in the same place when all these changes have happened for college basketball, sort of what's been your perspective? How have you maintained what you do over the last few years with everything kind of getting turned upside down?**

BRETT REED: Well, I think it's been great for student-athletes for a long time. They've been part of this kind of college basketball ecosystem. There's some financial rewards for them to be able to play on these stages.

I support the growth and development and opportunities for all the student-athletes out there.

But for us, what we've really kind of focused in on are the true tenets of why we coach. This is an educational, kind of like offshoot of a great university, where people learn in labs and they learn in classrooms, but we have a chance for people to learn on the court and grow and develop, become future professionals where they can take on leadership positions.

I've never wavered from that. For me as a professional,

there's a lot of things that I can do. There's a value that I place as an ultimate competitor in winning. But I take the greatest pride in helping people grow.

Maybe that's part of the reason why everybody has been so bought into what we're doing that they want to stay. I know the college basketball climate has changed. We certainly, and myself, can be super adaptable to that. But I also think there's a value that I place where it's wonderful that these guys celebrating their championship, they've been here together.

We don't have a single Division I transfer on our roster right now. This is homegrown. This is where players develop and get better and take on more and more responsibilities, and the beautiful thing is 10, 15, 20 years from now when they come back to celebrate and be recognized, it's going to be a unit that has kind of like forged their way together in a very special way.

**Q. Can you tell me a little bit about the hopefully warm reception you've received here in Dayton? I know you mentioned this already.**

BRETT REED: Yeah, it's been great. Dayton is a great basketball community. Even the small touches; we landed and there's signage welcoming us and the other teams. Somebody had to stay up late at night thinking about all the details to make teams feel special to be here, and they have kind of like checked that box.

We even arrived at our hotel, and the funny thing is we ended up going to the Athletes Academy Wooden Family Center for a practice, and our band and cheerleaders kind of split from us because we wanted to be able to do a private practice once we came here, and our band and cheerleaders arrived at our hotel, and there's bagpipes playing and people cheering and doing all that type of stuff and everyone comes out -- I'm so glad that our students and administrators had a chance to feel that warm reception.

But guess what, there were no players there because somebody didn't get the memo we were going to play, and then we came back later and it was the same thing dialed up all over again, bagpipes playing, people waving, banging cowbells and doing all that type of stuff.

It's a really special experience for our guys and hopefully a memory that they'll cherish forever.

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