

# NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: First Round - Queens (N.C.) vs Purdue

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St. Louis, Missouri, USA

Enterprise Center

## Queens (N.C.) Royals

## Grant Leonard

## Nasir Mann

## Yoav Berman

### Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: Queens University of Charlotte Royals are with us. They are the 15th seed in the West region. They are the Atlantic Sun Conference champions they will play No. 2 seed Purdue tomorrow night at 6:35. Head coach is Grant Leonard. We will be here in a little bit. We have on the dais Nasir Mann and Yoav Berman. We will go right to questions for these two young gentlemen. Starting right here on the aisle.

**Q. I wanted to ask you both about your mascot there, about the dog, and how that came to be, where did he sit on the plane and just what has been your experience so far? How is this different from a normal road trip for your team? I think you guys flew on a private plane for the first time. If you could tell us a little about the whole experience.**

NASIR MANN: I wouldn't say he is more of our mascot, but more of an identity. We try to go out and play each game very hard and whoever we feel like was the hardest playing player, not necessarily the one who scores all of the points but the one who does the dirty work to get the win, usually gets the dog. That's how we like to portray it.

The experience was really nice. We all flew private. Nice plane. Nice smooth ride. Great service for everyone. It was a nice experience.

We would like to say, this is not too different than any other road game that we had or want to have. We have to go out there and have the same preparations. We still have our culture and we don't want to change too much from our culture.



YOAV BERMAN: It is definitely nice. It is another game for us. We are going to do whatever, whatever we do. Every game is the same for us.

Buddy, he has definitely been our identity. Just like Nasir said, we are going to go out and play hard every game.

**Q. I guess following up on that, do you try to enjoy this at some level? You say you want it to be like any other game, but it is something a little bit different. It is something no matter where you play may or may not come along in a college basketball player's career. Do you allow yourselves to enjoy sort of the distinctness of the tournament experience or is it all focused on what is next?**

NASIR MANN: Most definitely. Most definitely. This is a once-in-a-lifetime experience. I feel like our team is very good at separating when we need to be serious and when we can enjoy the moment. I feel like if you know our team, then we have been enjoying the moment very well.

Before we even came to March Madness we have been enjoying it well. We had a week off and we are really letting it sink in. This is a very special moment and we will never forget that. At the end of the day we do have to take care of business.

YOAV BERMAN: It is not a regular game. It is something special. We have been dreaming about it. We have been dreaming about it for the whole season. Definitely as Nasir says, we are locked in for this.

**Q. I talked to Oscar Cluff, Purdue's big man last week about what he knows about Queens. He said it was in New York somewhere. I told him it was in Charlotte. It went pretty viral on Twitter. Did you see that? Have you talked about that? What has been your reaction to that?**

YOAV BERMAN: We get that a lot when people think it is in New York. It doesn't matter. Definitely fuels you a little bit, kind of makes you mad. But it is what it is.

NASIR MANN: Yeah. We definitely saw that.

(Laughter). At first it was a little disrespectful, then we



realized probably a year or two ago before we came to Queens, we didn't know where it was either.

That's the best thing about this moment we can put Charlotte on the map.

**Q. Oscar is from Australia for reference. Purdue lost to Fairleigh Dickinson and St. Peter's. How much of a motivation is that that you guys can knock off Purdue in this next round?**

NASIR MANN: They definitely do have a history of it, but they are not the same team that they were in those other games. Neither are we. We are not Fairleigh Dickinson; we have our own team. We have our own identity. It is a good confidence boost to know that we have a team that lost to previous high seeds in the past.

YOAV BERMAN: It kind of puts pressure them on a little bit, but it doesn't matter. Like Nasir said, it is a different team. We are just going to go out there and compete.

**Q. Purdue has a player also from Tel Aviv, Oscar Mayer?**

YOAV BERMAN: Omer Mayer.

**Q. Have you met him before, being in the same place?**

YOAV BERMAN: I know him. I played him in my youth when I was 18. He is a great player. I am always excited to meet another guy from Israel.

**Q. What has it been for you in the last few weeks back at home. Not even a political side of it, human side of it, dealing with not being there. I am sure you have loved ones who are going through that?**

YOAV BERMAN: It has not been easy at times. I think a lot about my family and friends at home. I just pray for peace back there. But I can separate the two things, and when I go out there I think about basketball.

**Q. Where does Buddy stay? I am obsessed with Buddy. Does Buddy have his own room? Does he room with somebody? Who takes care of Buddy?**

YOAV BERMAN: Matthew Walter, one of the players he is always with Buddy. That's his owner whatever. He is always with him.

**Q. We talk a lot about Purdue and their skill set. What makes you guys dangerous to win in this tournament?**

NASIR MANN: I would definitely say our versatility and our

depth and health. We are a pretty healthy team. We have big guards. He is a 6'6" point guard. I am 6'5", 6'6". We have pretty big people on the team.

Also our ability is shoot and space the floor. Everybody on our team can shoot the ball at a pretty good clip. I think that's a very dangerous thing. You can get hot at any given moment, especially in March Madness. That's when the miracles truly happen. I do believe that's what makes us very versatile. We are able to switch a lot of things and we have a lot of length, which allows us to shoot passing lanes and cause turnovers.

**Q. What is your team like?**

YOAV BERMAN: First of all, off the court I love everybody on the team. I have never had a team where I am connected to everybody on the court and off the court. Just like Nasir said, we like to shoot 3s. We play fast and fun. Defensively we can switch up things. I think our separator is the rebounding. If we can control the glass and even out the turnovers and rebounding margins, we can definitely do great things here.

**Q. This being the first season of eligibility for you guys in the Tournament, was the anticipation of this opportunity go clear back to day one clear back to July and August that the thought was there, or let's let it play out and see where we are when March rolls around?**

NASIR MANN: I would definitely say before that. After our season ended and we decided we wanted to come back, we were talking with our coaches and they were saying, one more piece and then we have our tournament win. One more piece. One more piece.

We were making sure every visit when we brought someone in that we were on our best behavior. We made them love the area. We knew we only needed a few more pieces to put this all together and we knew we would be in March Madness.

I felt we had a great team. As the summer went on the goal became clear we were going to be one of the best in our league and we ended up winning our league. And, yeah, we have had the vision for a while. But I would say it was before the summer.

YOAV BERMAN: Ever since the last game last year we have been preparing for this moment, for this season. We definitely anticipated being here.

THE MODERATOR: Head coach of Queens University is with us, Grant Leonard. We are going to ask him about his

team about being in the great city of St. Louis then we will go to questions.

GRANT LEONARD: First of all, happy to be here in St. Louis. First time for many of our guys, not for me. Got to see a Cardinals game a few years ago.

Couldn't be more excited for not just our team and our program but the entire school at Myers Park community in Charlotte. They have really rallied around this experience. It has been a whirlwind of awesomeness. Super excited.

And I am going to open up to questions, but I am going to hand it off to my guy Paul. High school classmate, 1998, Martin Luther, and awesome to see you, Paul. Go ahead and shoot. You get first shot.

**Q. Well, thank you, Grant. It is good to see you. We have to meet up at some reunions at some point. I guess given that introduction I will ask you, to be coaching in the NCAA Tournament we sat in rooms years ago where they would wheel in the TV. I can agree they did that. What has it come to watching games in high school to coaching on this stage?**

GRANT LEONARD: Growing up in the Midwest in Milwaukee and actually watching games at the Bradley Center getting to see Penny Hardaway play in 1992 and watching James Forrest hit a 47-foot turnaround fadeaway to win a tournament game, it is just amazing as a kid growing up to realize now you are a part of it. Surreal would be the word that I use.

You know, for our players, it is a dream come true and for our school it is now too.

I do remember that at Martin Luther wheeling in the TVs and watching it. Yeah. Great to see you, by the way, Paul.

**Q. You mentioned how big this is for the school. How many times in your life have you been asked by people where is Queens? Why is it Queens? You think this week a lot more people are going to find out things like that?**

GRANT LEONARD: That's exactly the Monday Kerr I have. I am an optimist. Someone asked if I was mad that the Purdue center didn't know we were in North Carolina? No. This is an awesome way to bring more light to the school.

Queens is an amazing place. It is life changing. Queen's mission is provide a transformational educational experience to our students. It is a very student-centered culture. But I have been there 13 years, and it has

provided a life-changing experience to me. More people need to know about how unique and special Queens is, Charlotte, Myers Park how beautiful the neighborhood is, but how the education, it really prepares people for their next phase in life in a special way. I have been at six schools, and this is by far the most special place I have ever been.

**Q. I think a lot of headlines were made when you kind of commented about the Tournament situation. What has been the back and forth been like maybe since those comments that came out, since Bruce kind of said what he did at the tournament what has been the back and forth you have had maybe with Auburn or the Pearls or things of that nature?**

GRANT LEONARD: To clarify, I never called out Auburn. My comment was there was an SEC assistant. I want to make sure I am clear on this. Whether something is within the rules or not, coaches, no matter whether it is men's or women's, we are trying to lead and mold young people. We are trying to prepare them for their next phase in life through whatever sport we are coaching.

I coach basketball. Basketball can be an unbelievable vehicle to change kids' lives. As a leader of young men, I have an ethical thing that I have to do to teach them to do the right thing.

I don't think it is the right thing ethically to go to our conference tournament, sit on the floor and try to interact with my player in an elimination game. That is my opinion; it is not a fact. Is it permissible? Maybe, maybe not. Is it ethical? In my opinion no. That's my statement with that. I think as coaches we can draw the line and say enough is enough.

**Q. I appreciate you clarifying first on that first point. Secondly, would you like there to be better legislation over how that occurs would you like the legislation tweaked in that way?**

GRANT LEONARD: I am not going to worry about the NCAA legislation. They have bigger things to worry about. I will handle this with the NABC and our coaches, and we will discuss it as men together in a room.

**Q. Congratulations for being here. I wanted to ask about Buddy. Where did you find Buddy? And the players said there's one player in particular who takes care of Buddy and Buddy stays in that player's room. Tell us a little for those who aren't with your team all of the time?**

GRANT LEONARD: Buddy is like our spirit animal. I knew

we had a very talented team this year, scoring and shooting. I never thought that was going to be the issue. I always try to motivate them to do the little things, the tough things. This summer as we are trying to bring that spirit out in our guys, our guys said that they were dogs. One of the assistant coaches, Coach Short, and we call him "Bulldog," he asked him, are you a street dog or a Petco dog. His comment is saying, well, are you guys spoiled or do you have to fight for what you want? We want them to embody the street dog mentality of fighting for everything you can get.

The player that -- not that scores the most points, but the player that does the tough things, that takes charges, that dives on the floor that's the player that is awarded Buddy for that game.

Yes, we have a young man, Matt, who carries Buddy through the airport. I think he likes the attention. But Buddy has been great for us. And so he will be with Queens for a long time.

**Q. (No microphone).**

GRANT LEONARD: Usually on the water cooler right behind our bench. Have to keep him hydrated.

**Q. Can you touch on Carson Schweiger a little bit, his size, the three-point shooting and his ability and what he has been able to bring to the team?**

GRANT LEONARD: It has been a revelation to our offense. Carson didn't play a lot at Valpo, but you could see where it was going. That's why we recruited him. For a big man to hit ninety 3s in the season, he didn't even start off hot, it got there after November. Probably December he started to get rolling. Carson can really, really shoot. And the funny thing is, he didn't believe that he was that good, and now he is trying to -- he is just scratching the surface as a player.

That gravity he pulls as a big man, that gets bigs out of the paint, allows our guys to get downhill, which is why our offense is special because we shoot 63% at the rim.

**Q. Grant, when you are explaining the dog in them and things like that, I think you are also describing Purdue's point guard. He's listed at 6 feet probably more generously 5'9" going to break the NCAA assist record, unless you have the greatest defensive performance of all time. When you watch him play and know he's a 4-year player at one school what stands out in terms of what he has accomplished?**

GRANT LEONARD: He is inspiring. I voted him first team

player. He is the smartest player in the country basketball IQ-wise. He's on of the five toughest players in America. That doesn't include the skill, the passing, how he makes his teammates better. He is a special young man, and the respect I have for him is infinite.

And that goes with the Purdue program. Coach Painter, who I think is the model of what coaching should be. How he directs that program, how he leads, how he develops players, how he sees a player's strengths. Coach Painter is special. This is one of the top five programs in the last decade and it is a huge challenge for our program.

**Q. You guys are so much more than Buddy, but Buddy is fascinating and I don't think you answered the question Michelle asked earlier. Specifically where did Buddy get found from, what thrift shop or where?**

GRANT LEONARD: I wish I wasn't corporate enough. But it is Amazon.com. (Laughter).

This is actually Buddy 2 because Buddy 1 got injured in a celebration in Fort Myers after we beat Florida Gulf Coast. So Buddy 1 is retired and Buddy II is now sitting here.

The person who actually does the designs, I don't know her name, she did an amazing job. Buddy is pretty cool.

Greg, I am a big fan by the way. I read a lot of your columns.

**Q. Purdue has a habit of losing to high seeds FDU, St. Peter's. How much do you use that as motivation, talking to your guys knowing it can be a chance for you?**

GRANT LEONARD: Each team is very different. You can see that the year after they lost to Fairleigh Dickinson, they go to the National Championship game. It lets your guys know it is possible. Any of these upsets, it lets them know it is possible, not just Purdue losing in a game. The amount of focus one play at a time, 4:00 media at a time, our guys have to be unbelievably locked in to climb that mountain.

But, yeah, we will watch some clips of it, but please believe, I know when you have an All-American point guard who is a senior, that is not an easy feat.

**Q. Grant, what's with the sweater here? And what goes into your wardrobe choice for game day?**

GRANT LEONARD: The sweaters have become a thing. Years ago as many coaches are probably accused of being a little bah humbug during holiday season. To flip

that narrative, I started wearing joyous holiday sweaters, ugly Christmas sweater parties but I started doing it during games. People really liked them. The players really thought it was funny. It kind of brought a light mood to what we sometimes overthink things.

This year I expanded it and wore one for the day after Thanksgiving. It went viral. I stayed with it. We had one for Hanukkah when we played Wake Forest. I had one for Kwanzaa when I was at Auburn. I wore two Christmas ones. I wore Martin Luther King Black history month, Presidents' Day, Groundhog's day. It is pretty fun.

I am all Irish but I grew up in America. I am going to have one tomorrow that will honor both of those heritages. Should be fun.

By the way shout-out to Ray Hart who played at Queens. This one he designed himself. He's an artist. He sent me two custom sweaters, so I am happy to support him with this Queens sweater today.

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