

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

Friday, March 20, 2026

St. Louis, Missouri, USA

Enterprise Center

## Queens (N.C.) Royals

## Grant Leonard

## Nasir Mann

## Jordan Watford

### Media Conference

Purdue 104, Queens 71.

MODERATOR: Head coach Grant Leonard is with Jordan Watford and Nasir Mann. Questions for all three gentlemen on the dais.

GRANT LEONARD: First of all, congratulations to Purdue. There was a reason why they're preseason number one. They're pretty dang good. They played fantastic. Thought the offensive rebounding really broke us in the second half, broke the game open for them and then the second-chance threes kind of put it over the top.

Another shout-out to Braden Smith for hitting that his entire career but the assist record and all that. He's a phenomenal player, and you could see it on the court how under control he is.

Really proud of our team, our school, our community and all that we accomplished this year and how we represented the entire institution, the Atlantic Sun and everything that we did. It was an unbelievable season. Usually only one team ends happy, but our guys can hang their head high.

**Q. You got here. How intoxicating is this and how much do you want to get back?**

GRANT LEONARD: Yeah, a lot. I think everyone, Jordan has got three more years of college basketball ahead of him and he's a winner, but I know once you taste it you don't ever want to give it up. Nas has an unbelievable career, two NCAA tournaments, one at McNeese and one here.



But yeah, once you go, you want to go back. But the thing is, and we've been a part of a lot of winning here at Queens when we were at a different level. Everyone is going to be chasing you. You got a big target on your back and the amount of work you have to stay there is more than you put in to get there. And our guys will be ready for it.

**Q. Grant, there's only one first Division I NCAA Tournament team. What did this group mean to you?**

GRANT LEONARD: More than just the Tournament and the winning, they were amazing to be around because of the leadership. Starts with Nas as our vocal leader. Chris Ashby as our lead by example guy. Gus Larson is our lead-from-behind and pick-guys-up as they're struggling. Jordan is an unbelievable developing leader.

But this group was so fun. The unique personalities, the quiriness, all the things, it was just an amazing group to coach and proud that I could be a part of it.

**Q. Nasir, Jordan, what was this experience like for you guys and what will you remember most about this season?**

JORDAN WATFORD: All the way back to the summer, obviously being a freshmen coming in, just learning new things, experiencing new things all the way to here now. Like I can't be more blessed than what I already am. When it comes to remembering the season, the wins, the losses, the tough moments but how we all fought back from it how we fought through adversity to get here.

Obviously we're blessed to be here. Anybody would love here to get to March Madness. Some people play college ball and never touch March Madness. That's just a blessing.

NASIR MANN: Yeah. I definitely say it was a fun experience. That's what basketball should be about. Going out there work hard, have fun and you reach success. A lot of people aren't in the game having fun the way we were.

Playing with the guys it was unbelievable season. Made history. We made it here. Making great strides in



becoming a better team. So we have high expectations for our team for next year.

**Q. Part of the team last year when there was no eligibility and you guys pushed pretty far in your conference tournament anyway. How can getting here to this point springboard the program from here on out?**

NASIR MANN: I'd say mostly to let people know you can do it. We're not one of those teams that got eligibility and had to wait ten years before we got to the Tournament. We worked hard. We built a great foundation, a great culture and was able to get here. I feel like a lot of people who come to our school next year will understand the game plan, the footsteps and everybody can fall into place so they can know what success actually looks like.

**Q. There's always been the quips about the Queens location and all that, but how ultimately did you guys think of you as a whole and unit put Queens University out on the map?**

JORDAN WATFORD: Just obviously being the smallest school in the tournament, even being in Charlotte, North Carolina I feel like we showed, no matter the size of the school or nothing, like there's hoopers everywhere and I feel like we really showed that from all the way through the ASUN Conference all the way to here.

Even though we lost, like G said in the locker room we fought hard to the end. And I feel like you can't ask for more than that for a small school. Just show fight and that's what we did.

**Q. Grant, you've been a part of this program for a long time, and it isn't a program that came out of nowhere. You had it in Division II. What has carried it through to Division I to the point you guys get here in the first year the first chance to do it?**

GRANT LEONARD: Two main things. First, the character of the players. So Division I, Division II, the size of the players is different but the character is not. A championship program like you can win games with talented kids but championships are won with character because adversity hits, and good kids fight.

The second is the culture of the school. And Queens is a very student-centered place, center-focused place and the students come first. They get an individualized experience. And our school motto is not to be served but to serve. And I serve these players but they serve the community, and we build community through basketball.

That's why we've always won at Queens. It's the great kids. It doesn't matter if it's Division II or Division I. Good kids want to go to Queens because of the education they get, and that's why when it comes down and things get really hard our kids fight no matter what, and that's why we win.

**Q. Grant, at certain point was it just another basketball game or did you kind of take any moments in soaking in the experience or anything like that?**

GRANT LEONARD: I think the soaking in happens in the lead-up. When you cross those lines and the ball tips up, it's the same. And you build the routine and you do what we've been doing the whole time. We didn't change anything in our approach or anything. So, no, once the ball is tipped up, you feel like it's business as usual. It's the lead-up before. I thought our guys handled it great.

**Q. Coach, some real hard-hitting journalism here. Where do you get all these awesome sweaters and what is the back story? I was talking with one of the fans. They said it was something about a Christmas a couple years back. Could you go into that?**

GRANT LEONARD: Many years ago. Basketball season is during the holidays, and basketball coaches can be consumed at times. And it's always good to have balance in life. But I might have been accused as being bah humbug at one point in my life. To reverse that narrative I started wearing joyous holiday sweaters, and it started to lift people's spirits as people saw them, and then we started wearing them for games and kind of became a thing. And then a couple of them went viral this year and I kind of just kept taking, and then I had someone challenge me, like, hey, if you make the tournament, are you going to wear a sweater. And I was like, all right, I'll do it, deal. And we made the tournament, so here I am.

**Q. The last couple of weeks since winning the ASUN tournament, the attention you guys have had in the nation and maybe even worldwide with the sweaters and Buddy and just kind of what you guys have done, how would you sum up this season and what it'll mean to you going forward?**

JORDAN WATFORD: Just to sum it up, a blessing, honestly. Like we went through so many things, and for us to be here at this point, you can't ask for more than that. As a team, we all love each other, from the coaches all the way down to the players, whether they're red-shirts or not, we're just one big culture, one big family. That's one thing literally you don't find too many places.

You could go to a lot of different DIs, a lot of DIIs,



whatever, but the culture might not always be the same. It might just be strictly basketball. Here you don't feel like you're here for strictly basketball. You know you're going to develop outside of basketball and just be a better person in general.

NASIR MANN: Yeah. Obviously it was a great season. We accomplished a lot. We did a lot. We fought through a lot of adversity, and it's just been unbelievable so far. I know we didn't have the outcome we wanted today, but we still did the unbelievable. A lot of people wrote us off, coming from a small school, 1500 students, and we made it, you know.

**Q. Coach, obviously Braden breaks the assist record tonight. I'm sure you had watched a ton of film on him coming into the game, but when you see him live, what is it that makes him such an elite basketball player?**

GRANT LEONARD: It's probably his decision making while being under control. I really mean this. I think he probably has the highest basketball IQ in the country. And to go along with the toughness, you're not even talking about the skill yet.

He's a fantastic player. And you saw, I mean obviously we all saw it on film and have known what his career has been about, but the one thing I really appreciate about Purdue and their players, similar to us, they have high-character kids. Their retention rate is higher than most of the teams in our league. They develop players. They recruit unheralded players. I don't think Braden had any other high-major offers. And they just believe in their evaluation.

And that's how I look at Queens, and we're developing in the ASUN. Our goal is to build a sustainable power in our league, similar to what Purdue has done in the BIG TEN. But just know that the respect level for their program is ultimately at the highest level.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports