

Lehigh University Athletics



Still the Same Humble CJ

Men's Basketball

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By: [Justin Lafleur](#), *Lehigh Sports Communications*

A little before 11 a.m. on Sunday, [CJ McCollum](#) '13 entered Stabler Arena like he had done many times before. This time, it wasn't to get ready for a game. It was for a special ceremony honoring his number at halftime of Lehigh's contest vs. Holy Cross.

A lot has happened since McCollum graduated, most notably being selected 10th overall by the Portland Trail Blazers in the 2013 NBA Draft and budding into an NBA superstar. He has become a star off the court as well with his work as a journalist, and commitment to community service.

[CJ McCollum](#) is a household name, but he is the same humble person that everyone knew and loved during his legendary collegiate career.

"If you work hard & you have faith in your abilities & dedicate yourself, anything is possible."

Congrats to [@CJMcCollum](#), who is getting his number raised to the rafters at [@LehighMBB](#) today. We're proud of you, CJ!
pic.twitter.com/ixS0C0y17M

— Trail Blazers (@trailblazers) [February 24, 2019](#)

McCollum joined women's basketball great Erica Prosser '11, whose number was honored Saturday night, to make up Legends Weekend Presented by Coordinated Health.

"It's a special time to come back to the university, experience some of those memories of driving past certain food spots you went to, seeing East Fifth Street and seeing the commitment continuum that Coach Reed has in the locker room," said McCollum. "It's crazy, with so many memories and experiences that you cultivate in a four-year period, to be able to bring it together six years later."

McCollum has always been confident, but humble. Many would say they're surprised to be honored, but not CJ.

It's not that he's cocky, but rather confident. He expects greatness of himself and works tirelessly to make it happen.

"The goal was to leave a lasting legacy," said McCollum. "I made a lot of goals for myself and accomplished most of them. I learned a lot from my experiences and just being here, being around the staff, being around Coach Reed, Coach Wyche and my teammates, I was able to grow a lot as a person and player. This is exactly how I pictured it, to be honest with you, but it still feels weird to now be in this position."

McCollum knows "this position" wouldn't be possible without his development at Lehigh. With the support around McCollum in all areas (academics, athletics, strength and conditioning and more), combined with his drive to succeed, McCollum flourished.

Three members of Lehigh's current coaching staff coached McCollum – head coach Brett Reed, associate head coach [Antoni Wyche](#) and assistant coach [Harry Morra](#) (who was video coordinator during McCollum's career).

"I have good relationships with all of them," said McCollum. "Coach Reed obviously was one of the guys who saw me first, along with Coach [Matt] Logie – recruiting me and going through the process of figuring out where I wanted to go to school and why I should attend Lehigh. We have become friends, obviously as a working relationship, figuring out how we could win championships and continue to grow and develop.

"Coach Reed has helped develop me, not only as a basketball player, but also as a man.

"Coach Wyche and I talk every week or every other week," McCollum continued. "We're constantly in communication, talking about my season, talking about their season – staying sharp and making sure we're in the know with each other. Coach Morra came towards the latter part of my career, but he's another amazing guy. Loves the game of basketball and has continued to grow as a coach and instructor."

From the time he stepped foot in Stabler Arena Sunday to the time he departed, it was like he never left. It began by meeting with the 2018-19 team for a few minutes.

"I just told them a little bit about my experience and some of the things I learned playing here," said McCollum. "The moral of the story is to enjoy it. Work as hard as you can and understand that it's a game. Enjoy these years you have with your teammates and friends."

[.@CJMcCollum](#) has arrived to [@StablerArena](#) and is briefly meeting with the team before today's noon game.
pic.twitter.com/aa2ucW06X6

— Lehigh M. Basketball (@LehighMBB) [February 24, 2019](#)

After meeting the team, McCollum met with the media, signed some autographs, caught up with the many alumni who came back for his day, posed for photos and more. His day back included much more than just athletics; he also caught up with Jack Lule, Journalism Department Chair.

Professor Lule catches up with one of his star students before today's [@LehighMBB](#) game. [@CJMcCollum](#) [@trailblazers](#) [@LehighSports](#) [#Legends](#) pic.twitter.com/Zl6QZK0fv3

— Lehigh University (@LehighU) [February 24, 2019](#)

In Sunday's press conference, McCollum was asked how his time at Lehigh's student newspaper, The Brown and White, impacted his current journalism career (a career that includes his well-known [Pull-Up Podcast](#)).

"The Brown and White helped me a lot," said McCollum. "I learned how to edit properly; my punctuation was terrible. Figuring out where the comma goes vs. the semicolon, how to write a headline, how to do a byline. How to close. How to not write too much in the body of the story. Figuring out what types of quotes people care about.

"Even working with Lehighsports.com, being able to cover games and conduct interviews after games, I got a better understanding and appreciation of what goes into being a journalist," McCollum continued. "Now when I have to do interviews or give people quotes, I try to make sure I'm giving them enough to write a good story."

McCollum doesn't have anything to worry about. He has certainly given everyone he comes in contact with a *great* story.

His story is one of hard work, determination and confidence, all with a humbleness about him while not forgetting his roots.

"My Lehigh experience taught me how to handle myself in certain situations," said McCollum. "It prepared me for speaking engagements and prepared me for some of the things I want to pursue in journalism – podcasts, radio shows and things of that nature. It also helped me figure out how to assert myself outside of basketball, figure out how I can impact the communities and impact things outside of just being a basketball player."

Everything came full circle on Sunday for McCollum, who got choked up during his halftime speech, with the genuine emotion obvious in his face and body language. It was evident how much Lehigh University means to him, and that feeling is certainly mutual for the Lehigh faithful.

"It's crazy. You always picture getting your jersey retired and being in this position, but then it happens," said McCollum. "It feels really weird. I don't know if there's a better adjective to describe it, but I talked to [Trail Blazers' teammate] Evan Turner who got his jersey retired at Ohio State and he said to really enjoy it because it goes so fast.

"Try to really soak it in, because you're going to really appreciate it as you get older."

Photo Gallery Photos by Brent Hugo and Bruce Ely

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