

From Lakeland to Ann Arbor, Michigan’s LJ Cason Reflects on His Roots

By Kaydence VanEtten | February 5, 2026



(LJ laying up a basket for the Wolverines. Photo courtesy of Steve Fitzgerald.)

LAKELAND, Fla. — Lakeland native Lorenzo “LJ” Cason Jr., is making headlines for the University of Michigan Men’s Basketball team. However, this recognition doesn’t stop him from remembering where his roots lie.

LJ said, “Me playing at a big ... program like Michigan, I feel like a lot of people, a lot of kids, ... feel like that’s untouchable. Like that’s their dreams. Like it’s unreachable. So, for me to do it from a small place like Lakeland, I feel like it just gives them hope and ... makes them believe in themselves. That they can do the same things that I can do.”

LJ first started playing basketball before his fourth birthday. While his exposure to the court started young, it wasn’t until middle school until his love for the game truly developed.

After his freshman year of high school, LJ transferred from George Jenkins High School to Victory Christian Academy (Victory). He was looking for a program that would pour into his

growth as both a person and an athlete. By transferring to Victory, he was able to grow in his faith and create meaningful friendships off the court.

“I think I truly learned how to play basketball at Victory,” LJ said. As a freshman at George Jenkins, LJ averaged 12.4 points per game (PPG) while coming off the bench. His stats increased to 27.6 PPG during his sophomore and junior years at Victory and 24.5 PPG during his senior season.



(LJ setting up a play for Victory. Photo courtesy of Steve Fitzgerald.)

“What he has is just this combination of, obviously, great skill and athleticism, but he’s got a really strong mental capacity,” said Coach Steve Fitzgerald, Victory’s Head Men’s Basketball Coach and LJ’s high school coach. “You had to make sure that you were on top of your game because he knew so much... You couldn’t put anything past him.”

Compared to his opponents, LJ stood out both mentally and physically, demonstrating his high basketball IQ and on-court awareness. Fitzgerald described LJ as being, “Mature beyond his years... He was probably the most confident player I’ve ever been around.”

When the time came to look ahead at college-level ball, LJ saw recognition from smaller NCAA Division I programs.

LJ committed to continue his basketball and academic career at Florida Atlantic University (FAU) under the leadership of Dusty May. In March 2024, May left the FAU program to take on the head coaching position at the University of Michigan (Michigan). LJ entered the transfer portal, unsure of what his future had in store for him.

The transfer portal opened LJ and his abilities to NCAA Division I programs. He received offers from many schools, including the University of Florida. With the increase in recognition, this left LJ with a major decision. Does he follow May up to Michigan or does he commit to a different program?

LJ decided to follow May to Ann Arbor. To him, this decision was a no-brainer. He knew where he wanted to go and who he wanted to play for. In regard to offers from other schools, LJ said, “That’s good that all of ya’ll think I can play there [at the school’s respective program] but I know where I want to go because he [May] believed in me when ya’ll didn’t.” If he questioned whether he made the right decision, those worries sure aren’t evident in his success at Michigan.

This season, LJ has racked up a strong 411 minutes for the Wolverines, with an average of 18.7 minutes per game (MPG). He’s also put up a season total of 160 points, 43 rebounds, 53 assists and 17 steals. Against Michigan’s recent matchup against rival Michigan State, LJ saw 12 minutes of the court where he added three points and three assists. LJ also contributed to Michigan’s victory over Ohio State, bringing in eight points, one rebound and three assists from his 23 minutes of playing time.

Fitzgerald said LJ’s future in basketball looks promising and believes he can take it to the next level if he remains consistent in his confidence and athleticism. Fitzgerald said, “I think he has the ability to play in the NBA ... especially going to Michigan ... [they] really helped him with that.”

LJ is adjusting to a new stage of life in Ann Arbor. Living over 1,000 miles away from home isn’t easy. Luckily, he has a support system waiting for him when he steps back into the 863. He’s still in contact with many of his Victory teammates and keeps a close relationship with the Fitzgerald family.

When LJ comes back to Lakeland, he makes it a point to stop at Victory and say hello to his hometown friends. His graduating class consisted of about 60 kids, which led to everybody knowing everybody. “A small class like that ... just really allows me to lock in on myself and become ... the best person I can be,” said LJ. “It became like a family at Victory.”

When LJ transferred to Victory, he stepped into a big brother role for his teammates. A role he still carries to this day. “That’s pretty much like the friendship I have with a lot of them,” LJ said. “I’m kind of like a big brother.”



(LJ (middle) pictured with Steve (left) and Teri (right) Fitzgerald.)

With Polk County having a high recruitment rate for football, it’s important to LJ that he brings basketball recognition to his community. Fitzgerald added to this thought, saying, “He really put the basketball program on the map here [at Victory].” Prior to LJ, no one knew anything about Victory’s basketball program. This transformation was accomplished by LJ’s work ethic, dedication, success, example and the way he carried himself.

Today, his legacy can be seen throughout the Victory and Polk County communities. According to Fitzgerald, LJ is one of the top athletes to come out of Polk County. He has the third-best individual game scoring record, which was achieved during his junior year. LJ racked up 57 points in a 2023 match-up against Auburndale, bringing in an additional seven assists and 11 rebounds.

It's safe to say that LJ takes pride in where he comes from. With the upbringing of young athletes throughout the Victory and Polk County communities, LJ has some advice to pass down to the next generation.

As for the younger athletes of Lakeland whose dreams are reflective of LJ's accomplishments, he says, "Advice I'd give a younger athlete ... coming from Lakeland, Florida, is just to never settle yourself short. You never know what you are capable of until you do it. And that's what I ... live by and I'm going to continue living by. And that's what got me to where I'm at now ."