

**ESPN.com:** Men's College Basketball [[Print without images](#)]

Tuesday, April 3, 2018

## Champion Wildcats celebrated upon return to campus

---

Associated Press

VILLANOVA, Pa. -- Amid chants of "Nova! Nova!" Villanova students and fans loudly welcomed their men's basketball team back to campus Tuesday night, a day after the Wildcats claimed their second national championship in three years.

Players were treated like rock stars as they made their way into the ancient Jake Nevin Field House for a celebration.

"What's better than this?" coach Jay Wright said as the crowd roared.

Behind [Donte DiVincenzo](#)'s career-high 31 points off the bench, Villanova routed Michigan 79-62 on Monday in San Antonio to win the school's third national title.

Junior forward [Eric Paschall](#) held the championship trophy, and the bleary-eyed players wore hats lodged with strands of the nets they cut down a night earlier. [Jalen Brunson](#), the national player of the year, led the fans in a chant of "Di-vin-cenzo" before he was introduced last among the players.

"The chances of a red-headed Italian with Rollie Massimino 'RVM' on his chest, coming off the bench to score 31 points in the national championship game," Wright said before the crowd drowned him out, referring to the late Wildcats coach who led the school to the 1985 title.

The top-seeded Wildcats (36-4) won all six of their NCAA tournament games by double digits, bucking the trend of tourney upsets thanks to depth, buzzing offense and improved defense.

"Go Cats!" junior guard [Phil Booth](#) yelled.

Rain forced the celebration to be moved inside from the football stadium, but it didn't dampen the enthusiasm at the Catholic school of about 6,500 undergraduates in suburban Philadelphia.

The tributes began immediately as the Wildcats landed, when the Philadelphia fire department delivered a water cannon salute as their plane taxied.

On their Main Line campus, fans, many of whom had a blue "V" painted on their cheeks, stood in the rain in a line that snaked around the corner waiting for the arena doors to open.

Included in the crowd was Ron DiPietro, class of 1972, who said he will turn 68 on Wednesday. DiPietro clutched a gray 1985 Villanova national title T-shirt on a coat hanger.

"Too much firepower, well-disciplined, wonderful team," DiPietro said. "They blew everybody out, let's face it."

The pep band and cheerleaders entertained the crowd before the team arrived. The balcony seats in the 1,500-seat arena were nearly full, with hundreds more on the floor crammed near a barrier around the stage. A banner hung that read "Congratulations 2018 men's basketball national champions."

Fans yelled "One more year!" to both Brunson and [Mikal Bridges](#) as they were introduced by Wright. Neither player wanted to comment on their futures, but Wright indicated returning to school was wishful thinking.

"We're going to talk about it this week with those guys," Wright said. "But both of them are going to graduate, and both of them have a chance to become first-round picks."

Next up is a parade Thursday in Philadelphia that will end with a rally outside City Hall as the region basks in its recent sporting success. The [Eagles](#) won their first Super Bowl two months ago.

"I'm proud of the Eagles, and I'm proud we're even part of it with them," said Wright, an Eagles season-ticket holder. "I'm really happy for the city of Philadelphia."

---