Ask students on the Lehman College campus if they'd ever heard of the Lightning cheerleading team and the usual response is an incredulous 'Lehman has cheerleaders?' And who can blame them? The cheerleading squad has only been around since 1994, and as division III college sports go, cheerleading doesn't rank high on the exposure or budget scale. But these disadvantages don't keep the all-woman team from putting on their best cheer. Their recent performance on MSNBC's "Hardball College Tour" show with host Chris Matthews proved just that.

The audience gathered at the Lovinger Theater was greeted to a lively traditional mid-western cheer that involves precision arm motions and booming voices. When they're not performing before political talk show hosts and former vice-president's of the United States (Al Gore was guest), the girls take their act to different CUNY athletic sporting events where they cheer Lightning teams. There they perform a combination of the mid-western cheer and step dancing, which involves more rhythm and is a sure crowd-pleaser.

The team's appearance on Matthews's show began with an urgent phone call from APEX director Martin Zwiren to Head Cheerleading Coach Stacy Letford requesting the girls' appearance—one and a half days before the scheduled tapping. The request was a first and it took the coach by surprise, but she quickly mobilized her girls for the last minute performance. "We practice year round, so it was just a matter of deciding which cheers to perform," says coach Letford, who cheered for the Lightning during her undergraduate years at Lehman.

Indeed, Letford, who had been a cheerleader at August Martin High School in Queens, NY, was one of the first to join the squad. "In the beginning it was very exciting because we didn't know the rules and we sort of made them up as we went along," said coach Letford. Her coach at the time was Tami Tanaka, who came from a dance background. Her influence can still be seen in the girls' rhythm and dance repertoire.

Once a year, the team competes against Baruch, York and Medgar Evers colleges—the only other CUNY colleges with cheerleading teams. The lack of competition is not a deterrent for Coach Letford, who tries to place her team in as many competitions as possible. "I'm very passionate about cheerleading," says Coach Letford. "When the girls meet for practice, I don't just sit on the sidelines and tell them what to do, I actually practice the cheers with them," she said. And it's Letford's enthusiasm and drive that revs up the team's spirit and keeps them up to standards.