

“We Never Look Back”

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Reporter



Boys Varsity Basketball line the hallway before their Senior Night game against Bridgeport Central on Tuesday, February 11.
Photo by Eugene Caibal ('25)



Players and staff of Boys Varsity Basketball watch the JV match against Bridgeport Central from a hallway. (Left to right) Abdoulaye Konate ('25), Joey Homicki ('25) Omar Martinez ('25) Gavin Daniels ('25) Derrick Fenyo ('25) Juan Rangel ('25), Alex Whang, and Coach Roberto Nieves. Photo by Eugene Caibal ('25)

Boys Varsity Basketball lost all but two games during last season, ending with 2-17 overall and failing to qualify for a state championship run.

This year, though, things have been different: for the first time in three years, the Boys Varsity team made it back to States, and hopes are high at the Hill for something akin to a March Madness miracle. All 18 of them want to make one thing clear: this did not come easy.

"We've been working hard since the summer. We've been setting goals since [our] sophomore year to hopefully make it to States and go somewhere with it," Taha Ismaili ('25) said.

A mindset of resilience, Ismaili said, has been key in the team's return, echoing a saying shared by the team.

"We wanna know everyday. We stay wanna know everyday, and every game we win, we never look back."

Despite the losing record the team had garnered in the years prior, Ismaili said the team brought forth a new "chin-up" culture into the picture. The team has put a recent emphasis on keeping an eye out for "the bigger picture down the road," senior captain Abdoulaye Konate ('25) said.

This season, even after a tough loss, Ismaili said the team never stopped to dwell on it for too long. "We just keep

going ahead, every single time."

This mindset has been with the team since day one, as despite the harsh losses, everyone who didn't graduate from the team last season came back for another.

"After last year, [even though] we had a pretty rough season, I wanted to come in and try to have the best season we possibly could," Zikkari Ecan ('25) said. "Try to win some games."

This fresh start came with a chance to change their playstyle and tactics in order to succeed. "We started playing more team basketball. Team basketball won games," Ecan said.

Bouncing back for the basketball season also meant a lot of personal growth. "You just really just had to maintain discipline even if games [were] tough, even if the last two seasons weren't necessarily the best. You just gotta keep on working hard and keep that mindset so that everyday is a learning experience," Juan Rangel ('25) said.

Coach Roberto Nieves, Varsity Basketball's coach, has also grappled with the struggles of last season, saying the team reflected on "a lot of learning curves" in order to achieve the goals that they have reached so far.

"[The team went through] a lot of maturing, and a lot of growth that we had to do as players and

coaches," Coach Nieves said.

Much like his players, Coach Nieves ended last season with a goal of pushing through the challenges they've faced, and he said he accomplished this goal during the offseason. The team identified and implemented corrections to ensure their weaknesses aren't too prominent, Coach Nieves said.

Reaching States made Nieves believe that the hardship and lessons learned from past seasons had paid off, both individually and as a team.

Reaching States was "one of our goals," Coach Nieves said.

"I think our kids are excited. We haven't been to the states in three years, so it's a big accomplishment."

For him, the comeback to States has kept him motivated for the long term. The team wants to "continue to have the same success and hopefully have higher success as the years come along," Coach Nieves said.

Despite the loss of nearly a dozen graduating seniors this season, senior captain Abdoulaye Konate said he believes the foundations that he and his fellow seniors have laid this season will sustain for future players to come.

"I want to impact them in a great way, and I want to put them in a position that makes Westhill basketball a great program," Konate said.



JOEY HOMICKI lays one against Bridgeport Central in the Senior Night Game. Photo by Ava Homicki ('26)



THE BOYS break their huddle before their game on Tuesday, February 11. Photo by Eugene Caibal ('25)