

The Tipping POINT

BY DOM MANGANO
DESIGNED BY GAVIN VEST

Now in his fourth year as the varsity boys basketball head coach, Will Pope hopes to lead a promising Monarch squad to its full potential.

Just over three years ago, a new basketball season at PLHS had begun. However, this one looked much more different than ones in recent years, as along with the fresh new faces on the court, there was a fresh new face on the sideline as well.

That new face would be head coach Will Pope, who had been a basketball coach for over a decade, but was making his debut for the Monarchs. Heading into his first season, Pope was not thrown into the easiest situation, as it was his job to give the team an identity entering its new era.

“When I took over, we had no returners, so I knew it was gonna be

a challenge,” Pope said. “But it was a challenge that excited me.”

Entering his fourth year at the helm, Pope has a team that is fully developed by him and his coaching staff, as the freshmen he had during that first season are now the team’s seniors. One of those seniors, DeMarcus McCarty, credits a lot of what he knows today to coach Pope.

“I love his commitment to coaching,” McCarty said. “A lot of what he teaches me is stuff I can apply to other sports as well.”

Building a bond with your players is always important as a head coach, as it takes more than just teaching the basic fundamentals of the court to be seen as great. Pope also has to get to know the people he is dedicating hours of his life to teaching, something that he is quite comfortable with.

“I love being able to compete and make an impact on young players,” Pope said. “I want to give players positive experiences as they go through life.”

While the player-coach bond is strong, it is also important to keep the relationship between the players themselves strong as well. Successful teams are much more than just the talent on paper, as the energy on and off the court between each player is needed for

both gaining and keeping momentum going.

“We all work well together,” junior guard Preston Avalon said. “All of us are friends both on and off the court.”

Of course, the hard work that goes into being a basketball player is immense, and not a lot of people are built for the dedication and grind required for it. For coach Pope, seeing players with the desire to grow on the court is what he believes is the most important characteristic in a player.

“The guys that can show up on a daily basis and be committed and disciplined are the only ones that really give themselves a chance,” Pope said. “You need a team of people who are willing to be selfless and put others first.”

After finishing with a 9-15 record his first season, the product of Pope’s development of the team first came into fruition at the end of last season, when Monarch basketball qualified for the state tournament for the first time since 2017.

“[The state tournament] was also a result of all the work the group had put in,” Pope said. “It marked us setting bigger goals for ourselves and realizing that we’re capable of accomplishing championship level aspirations as a group.”

Seeing the players you coach being willing to spend time with each other, even when they are off the court is a great feeling as a coach. When all of the players are happy to be around each other, it is hard for it to not spread to the coaches as well.

“I look forward to being in the

gym with those guys every day,” Pope said. “They’re fun to coach and are awesome people.”

Led by a coach who loves working with his players, and players who love working with their coach, Monarch basketball has found its identity both on and off the court, and with the help of the upperclassmen’s leadership, the sky is the limit for its future.

Stat Changes

22-23 Season

55.3 4.5 15.1

Points - Steals - Turnovers
Per Game

63.3 6.1 10.3

25-26 Season



1. Varsity boys basketball head coach Will Pope gives advice to his team during a timeout.
2. Pope fires up his team from the sideline during the annual Color of Hope game on Jan 23.
3. Senior DeMarcus McCarty dunks the ball on a fast break against Omaha Westside.
4. Pope talks with one of his students in his classroom. Pope teaches both on-level and AP level US Government & Politics during the school day.

Photos: Carly Peterson / Illustration: Olivia Harruff

*“The guys that can show up on a daily basis and be **committed** and **disciplined** are the only ones that really give themselves a chance.”*

- Coach Will Pope