

Local father uses basketball to put his kids on path to success

BY TIMOTHY RAMSEY
THE CHRONICLE

Tom Lopez is just a hard-working family man looking to put his kids in the best possible position for success. So far, three of his four children have begun their basketball careers on the AAU and school level, with one more not too far behind.

The three oldest Lopez siblings play basketball with the CP3 AAU program, among others. Lopez himself does one-on-one training with his children to give them a leg-up on the competition. He feels that basketball will keep his kids focused on the right path, instead of focusing on negative outside influences.

One might think that Lopez himself is an avid basketball player, but that is not the case. He did not even grow up playing basketball. It all started with an observation of his oldest daughter's leadership qualities at her elementary school field day. The next week, Lopez took her out to Rupert Bell Park to shoot and they have never stopped. Once his oldest daughter caught on to the game, her younger siblings weren't far behind.

"It wasn't because I played as a youth, it probably was because I didn't play," Lopez said of the reason he introduced the game to his kids. "My mother always said she wanted to give us things she didn't have and as a parent, I can see that is the true way of life.

"The structure you get from sports, the teamwork and the lack of idle time to get into other things, is what I take from it. Sports



Jon Lopez, middle, stands with his kids. From left to right are Kaylen, Isa, Javi and Teo.

Photo by Alphonso Abbot Jr.

in general just kind of gives them a purpose."

Lopez said his children know that if they do not take care of their business during the week at school and home, they will not be permitted to play in a tournament that weekend.

One of the biggest benefits for having his children play basketball is they are like a team among themselves, Lopez said. They are always cheering one another on and work together to get better at their craft.

Lopez routinely works with his kids after practice and weekends to enhance

their skills. He began by watching YouTube videos and emulating what he saw on the videos. He also reached out to his friends and former college roommates, Cory Baker and Mike Russell, for further advice.

"To this day, I know I don't know as much as some of these trainers out here know, but that is why I take them to the CP3 Academy and I pay attention as well to see what we can do," he said. "A lot of it is just spending time with my kids in the gym and the repetition and finding a way to make it fun.

"A lot of guys who train kids have played basketball their entire lives. I just learned slowly and try to have fun and be consistent."

Once his younger children got a glimpse of their older sister on the court, it was no doubt they would soon follow suit, said Lopez.

Playing defense and ball handling are the things Lopez likes to focus in on while training with his kids. He says there are a lot of kids who can shoot, but if you can play defense and handle the ball, you will always have a place on any

team.

"Everyone wants to put the ball in the basket, but if you can handle the ball and play defense, your coach is going to want you on the floor," Lopez continued. "I work with them on ball handling because I am not a 7-footer, so they will not be very tall when they get older."

Lopez is hoping basketball opens up a world of possibilities for his children. He constantly tells them this is "God's plan" and the sport of basketball will keep them on track.

"I don't talk about them going to the league,

I talk about school and how basketball can help them get into college," he said. "I scrape by trying to figure out how to pay for everything for them, but I think it's better to go the route we are going so one day they can get a full ride to get their education.

"What I want for them ultimately is to have a healthy lifestyle. It's not about being rich and it's not about being famous, it's about having a healthy lifestyle. It took me having a not so healthy lifestyle to realize how important it really is."

Lopez also wants his kids to use basketball as a means to give back to their community. He feels it is not only important for his kids to succeed, but also wants them to help others succeed, if possible.

It's encouraging to hear people complimenting him on his work with his kids, Lopez said. He says he is humbled when he hears complimentary words from others, especially from those he doesn't know.

For Lopez, he is proud of his children's work ethic, rather than their accomplishments on the court. The fact they go out there every day to give it their all is what he enjoys seeing the most. The icing on the cake is that all his kids made straight As during the last quarter of the school year.

"I am proud of them for trusting a process and going through with it," he said about his kids. "It's not so much about being the best, it's how dedicated are you and that's what makes me proud.

Livingstone names new head women's basketball coach

SALISBURY — Livingstone College announced Friday a new addition to the Blue Bear athletics family.

Athletic Director Lamonte Massie-Sampson announced during a press conference on the Salisbury campus that Chainte Wester was the new head women's basketball coach.

Wester comes to Blue Bear country after serving as assistant women's basketball coach for the Virginia State University Trojans since August 2006. She joined Virginia State University after reuniting with former Shaw University Assistant Coach James Hill, Jr.

During her tenure at Virginia State, Wester participated in five regular-season division championships in the CIIA Conference, four NCAA appearances and a CIIA Championship as VSU captured more than 200-plus wins.

Wester has mentored several all-conference players, league players of the year, first-ever VSU HBCU/CIIA players of the year and academic All-Americans.

She worked primarily with the guards in her role at Virginia State and assisted Hill in all facets of player development, on-the-court coaching and individual skill instruction, as well as recruitment. Her administrative responsibilities consisted of coordinating and directing community relations, outreach projects, and managing and organizing team managers. She also oversaw

the academic study hall and academic progress of the student-athletes within women's basketball.

In 2013, Wester was selected to attend the NCAA Black Coaches and Administrators Achieving Coaching Excellence (ACE) Program. In 2008, she attended the NCAA Women's Coaches Academy.

"We strongly believe this is not only a next-level move for Coach Wester, but for our women's basketball team," said Massie-Sampson. "She is ready and eager to excel as a head coach and deliver her own coaching style to our players."

"This is a new day. I am truly excited to be here and bring back a winning tradition to the Blue Bear country ... There is a lot of talent here, and I plan to bring the best out of each member of this team," Wester said.

Born in Havana, Florida, Wester was a stand-out high school player at Havana Northside High School under the legendary coach Rosa Hughes-Browning. She played collegiately for two seasons at North Florida, earning Panhandle 2nd Team Conference honors both years. She then transferred to Shaw University for the 2000-2004 seasons, where she received several awards including outstanding player, outstanding service award, athletic trainer senior award, most improved basketball player and outstanding student honoree.

She graduated cum



Athletic Director Lamonte Massie-Sampson with new women's basketball coach Chainte Wester

Submitted photo

laude from Shaw University in 2003, earning her bachelor's degree in allied health and recreation. In 2010, she received a master's degree in sports management from Virginia State University.

"We have confidence that Coach Wester was the best choice to lead our women's basketball team," said Livingstone President Dr. Jimmy R. Jenkins, Sr. "Her leadership capabili-

ties and athletic prowess are evident and we look forward to her cultivating a spirit of excellence among our student-athletes on and off the court."

Livingstone College, affiliated with the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, is a private, historically black institution located in Salisbury, N.C., and is secured by a strong commitment to quality instruction. Through a

Christian-based environment suitable for learning, it provides excellent liberal arts and religious education programs for students from all ethnic backgrounds designed to

develop their potential for leadership and service to a global community. For more information, visit www.livingstone.edu.

Failure

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make sports safer, but let's not take away some of the crucial benefits that sports give a child.

I think kids are more resilient than we give them credit for. We don't need to celebrate failure the same way we do victory; I think we should celebrate effort more instead. I don't think a kid will quit a sport just because they did not receive a trophy or certifi-

cate.

Let's start preparing our kids for the real world and let them know that failure is going to happen. This fantasy world where everyone wins does not exist when they become adults. We should not put them in a situation that causes them to have negative outbursts because they don't know what to do when adversity comes; instead let them know that they must work harder to come out on top.

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