

game by game HANDSHAKE

Determined. They couldn't be stopped. The boys' basketball team for the first time in school's history finished the season with an undefeated record of 25-0 and the school's first boys' state title.

Driven by the shared goal of winning the state championship, the basketball coaches set the team's goals high.

"We have the team goal of winning state and just generally maximizing our potential," Assistant Varsity Coach Anthony Stubenrauch said.

Behind the scenes, the team supported and cared for each other, showing a brotherhood bond that goes far beyond the boundaries of the basketball court which added to the team's success.

"I have started to grow in maturity through the guys they help me see a different aspect of the sport and working hard and making sure no matter what you keep playing hard," sophomore Jett Smith said.

Stubenrauch inspired junior Van Collins to try his best. "Stubenrauch's personalized way of keeping positivity and focus adds understanding to the team's success," Collins said. "The best advice coach gave me was to keep shooting the ball whether the ball going in or not. Don't lack confidence."

Now even though they had one of the best seasons this school has seen they still had challenges along the way, including a pivotal matchup with Shawnee Mission East in mid-January. The Cougars showed their skills by scoring 68, points locking in a 68-57 inevitably beating them on that Friday.

"It was rewarding beating SM East because they were undefeated, and we were undefeated, and it was a Friday night game, so beating them was nice," Collins said.

On another Friday, the Cougars demonstrated their strength by dominating the Lawrence Lions with a final score of 65-29.

"Against Lawrence High School, we were playing poorly in the first half, and it was tied at halftime," Smith said. "Coach gave us a good halftime talk, and then we pulled it together at the end."

Smith figuring out personal and team challenges shows the importance of an uplifting environment even in tough times Smith's role as an upbeat guy within the team highlights the importance of an uplifting environment even when tough times occur.

Being on the court during games was an intense battle for the team transforming into a sacred space where they will remember this season and the people they shared it with. This unbeaten streak locked in their story of determination, unity, and strength that these boys without question have earned their championship trophy.

"And then I think what really sealed it was when Van threw the ball into the air," point guard Ty Jackson said. "And then we all stormed on the court and we all fell on top of each other, it was probably like one of the happiest moments of my life because like we just don't see each other as teammates we see each other as family and to see all of our hard work pay off really just made all of us happy and made me really happy as well."

STORY BY GABBY BLACKWELL
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THE BOYS' BASKETBALL TEAM SUCCEEDED IN THEIR JOURNEY TO THE CHAMPIONSHIP



DRIBBLING THE BALL, JUNIOR VAN COLLINS EVADES A DEFENDER DEC. 15 in the Main Gym. In basketball, players try to evade defenders when pushing towards the basket. "The goal when dribbling is to go all the way down the court," Collins said. "A lot of people are lazy getting back on defense so you can take advantage of that and get a bucket for your team." PHOTO BY COOPER EVANS

SOPHOMORE ETHAN TAYLOR TAKES A SHOT ON THE BASKET DEC. 8 AT OLATHE East. The Cougars beat the Eagles 75-85 in this game. "I was trying to shoot more because I just wanted to win really bad against Olathe East," Taylor said. PHOTO BY ANNAMARIE TORRES



SENIOR VINCENT NIXON JUMPS TO MAKE A SHOT JAN. 12 at SM East. At power forward, he works to secure the ball. "The most stressful part of my position is the physicality, which is mostly on the rebounding and defense," Nixon said. "It can determine the outcome of the game. I also think it's the most fun part though." PHOTO BY SIDRA SAKATI



CELEBRATING AFTER A WIN AGAINST THE MILL VALLEY Jaguars, junior Van Collins runs through a tunnel Jan. 30 in the Main Gym. It's a tradition after every basketball game win to make a tunnel for the players to run through. "The tunnel is super fun, especially with all the fans that came out and showed up," Collins said. "It's a great way to close out a good win." PHOTO BY KARA SIMPSON

here's the HANDSHAKE

BEFORE THE START OF EACH GAME, THE TEAM SPICES THINGS UP WITH A FUN RITUAL

When introducing the starting line up for the varsity boy's basketball team, each player sprints through a tunnel of their teammates till they reach senior Dominic Nixon to do each of their signature handshakes.

"When Birch asked who was doing handshakes, [everyone] just said me," Nixon said. "[Some] had their minds set because they saw them on TikTok, but [others] we just came up with."

