

The rhythmic thud of players bouncing a basketball against the floor reverberated off the walls of the gym. As onlookers held their respective breaths, orange and blue uniforms dashed up and down the court, their high tops clinging confidently to the newly waxed wood. A few more thuds, and then a swish. The ball slips effortlessly through the net, and the players celebrate while the crowd explodes into cheers, high-fives, and orange and blue signage. The game - and the boys basketball 2016-2017 season - had officially begun.

The team had a successful season despite not taking home the top honor, a win at the championship game. While the team started with a loss to Brandon, the boys quickly proved themselves a force to be reckoned with with four consecutive wins. Despite three losses in March to Northwest Rankin, George County, and Gulfport respectively, the boys resume their winning streak for a stunning 12 more games before being knocked out of the championships. The loss was difficult, but it proved not as important as the newly formed bonds and memories that result from such a season. Even in the toughest moments, the closeness of the team was nearly palpable. From long practices to exhilarating wins to high-fives on the court and huge grins, it was a season that each player would hold onto as one of the best.

While onlookers typically saw the finished product on Thursday and Saturday game nights, the boys basketball team puts in work both before the season begins and throughout the school week to perfect strategies, hone in

on weaknesses, and refine skills. One of the most integral aspects of the training process is head basketball coach Timothy Speech. However, Speech also ensures that the lessons he instills in his players are applicable to both the game and life. His players say that he makes a point to be intense and honest, and expects them to give everything they have, no matter if they are up by 20 or down by one.

"Coach Speech is not the average coach. He expects full percent from the starters to the 12th man on the bench," Trey Cotton (12) explained. "He always wanted to be direct with us to make us better players and young men."

While the coach is the top leader of the team, student leadership also played an important role in the team's dynamic. This year's team consisted of eight seniors, which played an essential role in the team's dynamic. The seniors were able to impart knowledge about the game as well as their own experiences in high school upon the younger players, lessons the underclassmen took to heart and will apply as they continue to play basketball at school.

"Basketball has taught me to trust in my teammates, and that without them I can never be successful in the sport," Chris Jackson (11) stated. "It has taught me the life lesson that hard work and determination can go a long way in life."