

West-Oak's Towe named area's best

By Ian Taylor

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WESTMINSTER — Going into the season, not a whole lot was expected of the West-Oak High School boys' basketball team, and by extension, its players.

After winning just one region win the previous year and having to replace eight seniors, all while breaking in a first-time head coach, it was thought the Warriors were just going to be building something for the future and not playing much of a role in the chase for the Western 3A region title.

As it turns out, West-Oak had other ideas.

Implementing a hard-nosed, physical brand of defensive basketball, head coach Matt Rowland changed West-Oak's place on opposing teams' schedules from a probable win to a nightmare. The Warriors created chaos on the court, forced opponents to work for every inch and went for more of a brute-force approach on offense.

But opposing teams weren't just trying to weather a storm — they were also trying to get out of the way of a freight train named Lucas Towe.

Going from sophomore role player to junior star, Towe averaged 14.9 points, seven rebounds, 1.3 assists and 1.7 steals per game and was the driving force behind a turnaround that saw West-Oak compete for the Western 3A region title this year, ultimately finishing second and earning a home playoff game.

His domination on both ends of the court resulted in him earning All-State honors and being named the region's Player of the Year. He's also The Journal's All-Mountain Lakes Boys' Basketball Player of the Year after his stellar junior campaign.

"Whenever we first started practicing, I knew I had a lot of potential, but it was just putting it into the gameplay," Towe said. "The past few years, we've struggled a lot, and going into the season with a new coach, it was going to be tough. Throughout the season, we just got better and better, and I certainly surprised myself. I think the whole team was surprised with how well we did this season."

A big part of the team's success was the implementation of a 1-3-1 defense, with Towe taking the lead, oftentimes handling the opposition's best player.

"He's so versatile," Rowland said. "I could put him at point guard, I could put him at the three, I could put him at the five. You don't get a lot of guys like that, and I hope this ain't the only one I have in my career."

Offensively, Towe brought a dimension that was difficult for other teams in the region to handle. Unafraid to lower his shoulder and drive through defenders while being as fast as any guard who tried to get in his way, Towe ended the year accounting for 30.7 percent of West-Oak's scoring. By the time region play rolled around, the train was not slowing down.

"It matters so much more in region," Towe said. "Before region play, we were thinking we had a good chance, but once we started winning these region games, we really had a moment of realization, 'Oh my gosh, we can actually do something.'"

All the while, the Warriors were building steam on and off the court — West-Oak likes winners, as Rowland reminded his players. By the end of the year a packed house was expected at every home game, and in the cramped, noisy gym, the Warriors thrived.

On average, West-Oak allowed 50.6 points per game on the road versus 36.8 at home. Both Towe and Rowland said the individual and team successes, Towe's accolades, West-Oak's title chase and the raucous crowds were all part of something larger — a new era of Warriors basketball.

"It's really laid the foundation for what I'm trying to do here," Rowland said. "Our whole thing all year was, 'We're going to try to put West-Oak on the map. It's about time for people to start showing us some respect.' We played with a chip on our shoulder every game."

However, West-Oak is not going into next season as much of an underdog as it was this year, and Towe is no longer a secret weapon. Even though he will lose frontcourt partners Anson Burgess and Braiden Moore, Towe has ambitions to continue to make noise in the region, and potentially after high school as well.



West-Oak High School's Lucas Towe is The Journal's All-Mountain Lakes Boys' Basketball Player of the Year after earning All-State honors during his junior season.

Photo by Caleb Gilbert

“I’ve got to take what I did this year, and I’ve got to take a few steps,” Towe said. “Take what I did this year and improve on the things I need to work on and just continue to improve the things I’m already good at. Next year I can have a more well-rounded game and really be able to shine.”

“He’s working really hard right now,” Rowland added. “He’s training, he’s playing travel basketball, so I think this year, he just scratched the surface.”

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