

Coach Wade Reflects on Navigators' Mid-Season Success

The Lee College Navigators basketball team is on a roll! Right now, the Navs are ranked #10 in the National Junior College Athletic Association with a 16-3 record (as of Tuesday, Jan. 17), and they are at the top of the 2022-23 NJCAA Region 14.

As the team continues to collect wins, the coaches and players have their eyes on a ticket to the "Big Dance" — the NJCAA tournament in March. If the stars align, this would be the Navigators' second consecutive trip to Hutchinson, KS under the leadership of Nicholas Wade, who is in his second year as head coach of the team and as the Lee College athletics director. He says our Navigators are on course to do "something very special this year."



Back, from left: Jorge Moreno, Terrence Johnson, Makalani Kafele, Malcom Steadman, Nickolas Traylor, Landyn Jumawan, Tidjiane Dioumassi, Justin Whitmore, Djahi Binet, Darrell Washington. Front: TaJae Jenkins, Kharee McDaniel, De'Vonte Austin, Aaron Thompson, Joshua Cooper.

Q. Your players have had a tough schedule this season facing off against some of the strongest teams in the country. Is that on purpose?

A. It's always been my mind set to play the best competitors in the country. I can't know how good I am as a coach or how good our players are if we don't play against some of the best competition. Every year my assistant coaches and I seek out who we feel are the most talented teams in the country. Our ranking isn't just based on how well we do but how tough the teams are that we play.

Q. Why do you think the Navigators are doing so well this season?

A. We are more talented. Last year, when I walked into the national tournament, I looked around and truly felt happy to be there, but I just didn't think we could compete on the national stage day-in and day-out because I saw what other teams had that we were lacking. We had to bring in guys that fit our culture: selfless, compassionate with the ability to do the right thing on and off the court. I must give credit to my assistant coaches Carliss Robinson, Russell Bundage and Casey Apetrei. They really made a push to recruit guys we felt were not only talented but also fit the Lee College culture, and I think we've done that well. These coaches are the reason why we are so successful and have a great program.

Q. What do you think needs to improve?

A. The attention to detail. We all know losing is hard because it could put a damper on confidence and attitude, but winning is hard too. So, keeping that same attention to detail every day is something we absolutely stress regardless of if we won three, six or 10 games in a row, or whether we are ranked #16 in the country or not. Our maturity is something I think could improve. You are dealing with 18-, 19-, and 20-year-old players who have a million distractions, and you are trying to keep them focused on a goal. I really do think this group has a chance to be special.

Q. Which players do you have your eye on this season?

A. Tidjiane Dioumassi is who has been making everything go. He's an incredible captain and leader. He's an international student who is also in the Honors Program. He's our hardest worker every single day. When you see our best player working as hard as he has, it just pulls up everything around you. The men's basketball team has a cumulative 3.0 GPA this year, and I must credit that to our best player being interested in his academics. When his teammates see that the best player cares, they will care. Other players to watch include Terrence Johnson, Djahi Binet, Darrell Washington and Landyn Jumawan.

Q. What are your thoughts as the team enters a crucial time forging forward to the NJCAA in March?

A. Lee College has the potential to do something special this year. Out of the three losses we've had, two of them have been against the number one team in the country by four points and the number three team in the country. I don't think people realize how close we could be if we figure ourselves out and stay focused.

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