

Matthew Stone prepares for a larger role going into the new season



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Junior guard Matthew Stone does not remember every one of the 111 games he played in his four years at Kingfisher High School — or every one of his 107 wins.

But, if asked to, Stone can easily rattle off the teams, the notable players and the final scores of the four losses he suffered at Kingfisher.

Freshman year: a five-point State Championship loss to Heritage Hall, who had current Creighton sophomore Trey Alexander.

Sophomore year: Booker T. Washington gave Kingfisher its only loss of the year, winning 61-64. On that team was current Oklahoma State junior Bryce Thompson.

Junior year: a playoff loss by 12 to Bethany.

Senior year: 33-27 loss to Edmond Memorial, which featured current Virginia Tech sophomore Sean Pedulla.

The losses stick in Stone's mind as a lesson.

"Each one of those losses made us even get closer as a group," Stone said. "It helps us stay locked in on what matters because a loss can be a lesson and you can [...] get better from it each and every day."

Winning at Kingfisher seemed routine, but Stone said culture was the reason behind all the success.

"I saw something I could fit into and contribute to and [...] they made me the player I am today," Stone said.

By the end of Stone's senior year, he had won two state championships and received several offers from schools such as Tulsa, Texas A&M and Oklahoma State.

But, in May of that year, when North Texas had reached out with an offer, Stone saw a similar culture and fit.

"I fell in love here," Stone said. "I want to be around great coaches, great players, but also just great people."

When Stone arrived at the university in his freshman year, he averaged 4.8 minutes in only 13 appearances that year. Watching from the sidelines, doubt began to set in.

"It was hard," Stone said. "I was like, 'I'm not making a lot of the plays I used to in high school, what else can I do, I feel like I'm not contributing, I feel like I don't belong here.'"

Now, JJ Murray, alumnus and former Mean Green guard, has helped him through the transition to the collegiate level. Murray, who made the Conference USA All-Defensive team Stone's freshman year, began talking through tips on playing defense with Stone and helped him slow the game down.

"I wish I got to play with him a lot more years," Stone said. "He was the next guy helping out the next and I feel like I need to do that for somebody else. I mean, he took me under his wing."

One piece of advice Murray kept giving Stone was to "stay ready." In the second round of the 2021 National Invitational Tournament, North Texas was matched up with Virginia. With 13 minutes left in the half, Stone slowly moved closer to the rim as former Mean Green guard Mardrez McBride shot a three.

Stone had his eyes locked onto the ball.

His defender, former University of Virginia guard Armaan Franklin, had his eyes locked onto Stone. When the ball barely scraped off the rim, for a second, Franklin looked away to grab the rebound.

Stone found his chance.

He swiped away Franklin's hands and hopped into the perfect spot for the ball to land in his hands. Stone took one quick dribble closer to the rim. Current 6-foot-11 UVA forward and at the time sophomore Kadin Shedrick was behind him, while 6-foot-8 UVA guard Kody Stratmann stood right in front of him.

Stone pump faked once and both defenders lightly jumped, giving him enough space to shoot the ball. Both swatted but his shot was already up in the air and on its way through the hoop.

The Mean Green eventually lost that game in overtime 71-69, but Stone remembers it as his first chance to help impact the game.

"It was very special to me," Stone said. "It helped me develop into my sophomore year [...] and I'm very happy for what I've become as a player because I was not doing really well, but the grass is greener now."



In Stone's sophomore year, he gained confidence in himself with a more defined role. Coming off the bench, averaging 15 minutes per game in 38 games, Stone prided himself on playing tough defense and coming into games with high energy.

"I knew what we wanted and that's what helped," Stone said. "I had a specific role and I accepted it [...] because the new group of guys like Kai Huntsberry, Tyree Eady, Jayden Martinez — they came in and were very successful. Having that run in NIT with that group of guys was truly amazing."

Going into this season and Stone's junior year, Stone said he has further embraced his new role.

"I love to win," Stone said. "I just love playing defense, just scrapping, doing all the dirty plays that help our team win."

Sophomore guard Grayson Allo describes Stone's play style with one word: energy.

"He's one of our main energy guys," Allo said. "Cuts, rebounds, all that, he's always keeping people positive, always trying to lead [...] he's always there helping his teammates stay positive, helping them be their best selves."

Looking forward to the start of the season, Head Coach Ross Hodge said Stone's leadership has stood out to him and he is excited to see what he will do this year.

"I've been a part of college basketball as a player, as an assistant, as a head coach for almost 25 years now and there's not a better teammate than him," Hodge said. "He's incredibly selfless and I'm super excited for him."

Featured Image: Guard Matthew Stone (right) waits to rebound a free throw attempt in practice at the Ernie Kuehne Basketball Practice Facility on Sept. 30th, 2023. Brock Burgan

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