

TAYLOR JENKINS

# Alum leads Grizzlies in playoffs

Less than two decades ago, Taylor Jenkins '03 was captain of the Lions on the basketball court for two straight years. Now, he is the head coach of the 56-win, high-flying Memphis Grizzlies. This year, he recently placed second in NBA coach of the year voting for his leadership and strategy.



**HUDDLE**

Jenkins motivates his team in an intense game at FedEx Forum, home of the Memphis Grizzlies.



**MENTORSHIP**

Jenkins speaks with Grizzlies star Ja Morant about the gameplan for the rest of the game.

In June of 2019, former Marksmen all over the country were extremely proud of their school and their fellow alum, Taylor Jenkins '03, for being hired as the head coach of the Memphis Grizzlies.

A little less than three years later, they have a new reason to be proud. Just 37 years old, Jenkins is one of three finalists for NBA Coach of the Year. His team, the Memphis Grizzlies, have tied the franchise record for regular season wins and boast the 2021-22 NBA's Most Improved Player, Ja Morant.

Jenkins believes the transition from the eighth seed in the Western Conference to the second overall seed in the league should be attributed to the player development program the Grizzlies have.

"The DNA of our program is player development," Jenkins said. "We value it and prioritize it every single day. Our coaches are available all summer long to work with the guys, and it has translated to a number of our guys including Ja [Morant] and Desmond [Bane] being in the conversation for the league's most improved player."

The Grizzlies have constantly received praise across NBA media for their strong team culture, and Jenkins believes the culture is a product of the vision he came to Memphis with.

"I want everyone, whether it's our players, coaches or performance staff, to be excited to come to work every single day," Jenkins said. "We want to play a disciplined style of basketball that's also fun, and we want to have a disciplined work ethic that's also fun. The way that we create that atmosphere is through the players we bring in."

Any coach can say their goal is to create a fun environment, Jenkins was actually able to create an atmosphere where his team is very competitive but also joyful in both practice and games.

"We're going to celebrate with each other, whether it's in the middle of a game, on someone's birthday, or when someone wins a shooting game in practice and earns the WWE champion belt we have in our gym," Jenkins said. "Healthy competition is fun competition. I want to make sure I'm bringing the best out of everyone by saying it starts with competing, but telling them to do it together and have fun doing it."

Although Jenkins is excited to be one of the nominees for coach of the year, he stands by the belief that the award is a team award and not just an individual award. He also believes the team's 'next man up' mentality is crucial to their success this season.

"Obviously, I have a vision for our system and what we have to do every single day, but our players challenged me a lot, and it's great to be able to have that motivation," Jenkins said. "I missed eight games this year with COVID protocols, and my assistants stepped up and did a fantastic job. Ja missed out on more than 20 games, and we still went 20-5 without him."

Despite a disappointing loss to the first seed Utah Jazz in the first round of last year's playoffs, Jenkins believes his team is ready to make a deep playoff run after a learning experience last year.

"Last year revealed that we had a long way to go, and we were far from a finished product and had more work to do," Jenkins said. "There's always something that you can work on. Coming into this year, we could

reflect on that. It really boils down to how you just plan to win one possession at a time, one game at a time and eventually win one series at a time."

Although Jenkins never wants to look too far ahead, he was aware that the Grizzlies could have potentially met the Dallas Mavericks in the Western Conference Finals, which would have brought him back where he watched so many Mavericks games as a child.

"If we're fortunate enough to continue to advance and it lines up where we play the Mavericks, that would be a full circle life experience," Jenkins said. "For a kid who grew up in Dallas, went to school in Dallas, has family and friends in Dallas and was a season ticket holder, that would be very special. Every time I come back to Dallas, coaching in front of family and friends, it's probably one of the most memorable road trips of the year."

Despite the fact Jenkins has coached successfully at the highest level of basketball, he has never forgotten how much this school has contributed to his current success.

"At St. Mark's, everyone's striving to be the most successful student, leader or athlete, but we're all members of a community, and the bonds that you have at St. Mark's are going to carry you for a lifetime," Jenkins said. "My best friends to this day are guys that I met in third grade when I entered St. Mark's, all the way to the guys that came to St. Mark's my junior year."

**STORY** Ben Adams, Nolan Marcus  
**PHOTO** Courtesy Taylor Jenkins

## A pain in sports much worse than losing — how I've overcome my biggest challenge

by **Ben Adams**

That damn knee brace. The knee brace with its endless straps, ugly color and hinges that never stopped squeaking.

It represented everything that came with my ACL recovery. My lack of fitness. The snickers from both my teammates and opponents. The lack of playing time I got.

And it was finally time to get rid of it. On that October day at Scottish Rite Hospital, I was looking forward to the years I had left playing soccer at a high level, finally healthy. Despite the blood, sweat and tears that went into recovering from a torn ACL and meniscus, I was well on my way to making the kind of recovery I had read about on ESPN so many times before. The initial exams of my knee were good. Then came the fateful x-ray.

Thirty minutes after hearing that my knee looked good and I could start playing again without the brace, I heard the words that I could barely comprehend at the time. "Ben, you're going to need another knee surgery."

This buried me with questions,

doubts, and, most of all, pain. While the answers would slowly come on why I needed surgery on my growth plate, the pain — more emotional than physical — never seemed to go away.



**BEN ADAMS**  
Sports Editor

My life seemed to whizz by as three months came and went, bringing another surgery, more physical therapy, and worst of all — more watching from the sidelines.

"I'm done." These two words were uttered to my parents more times than I can remember these last six months. Suddenly, the sport I had loved and played since literally before I could walk, the sport that gave me some of the greatest moments of life, the sport that led me to meet some of my best friends in life, didn't give me the same happiness it used to.

I didn't even want to go back to soccer practice after my second surgery. I didn't want to buckle the straps on the knee brace I was forced to wear

again. Even after I completed that first obstacle, there came many nights after practice when I would come home telling my parents I wouldn't go back. There were some good moments, including having one of my best performances at the prestigious Dallas Cup. Then came more bad moments, culminating in one of the worst of them all.

It came on a warm Thursday night, and I was not in the best mood on the way to practice. I hadn't done too well on a chemistry test, increasing the pressure of my final exam, and I was annoyed with my playing time, or lack thereof, in our two games the previous weekend. My bad mood came to a head when, after analyzing our two teams for our scrimmage, the coach switched me to the other team to make it fairer. There were a few snickers from my teammates, but they stopped quickly when they saw my face. Wiping tears from my eyes, all I thought was, "He thinks I'm not good enough."

That statement was cemented in my mind as I proceeded to play poorly

for the rest of practice, and as my dad drove me home, that statement became, "I'm not good enough." Over the following weekend, I had many tough discussions with my parents, but the overarching message was this: they had heard about this lack of happiness I'd felt from playing soccer for a while, and they understood and stood behind me in my decision to tell my coach I'd be quitting at the next practice.

The night before I was supposed to talk to my coach, my brain wanted nothing to do with sleep. I kept asking myself the same question, "Could I leave behind the sport I had loved and played for the last ten years?" Sure, there was watching and coaching and refereeing to possibly look forward to, but as so many have said before, nothing beats playing.

I finally decided no, I couldn't do it. I couldn't leave behind the hilarious road trips with my teammates, the practices where I'd do anything to stay and the opportunity to play a game where seemingly everything was on the line. No matter how tough it gets, that brace will keep squeaking.