

# WESTMONT WARRIORS

## SPORTS INFORMATION



Associate AD for Communication: Ron Smith  
E-mail: [rosmith@westmont.edu](mailto:rosmith@westmont.edu)  
Phone 805-565-7012

Sports Info. Asst.: Jacob Norling  
Email: [jnorling@westmont.edu](mailto:jnorling@westmont.edu)  
Phone: 805-565-6841

955 La Paz Road, Santa Barbara, CA 93108

## Leslie Named Men's Basketball Head Coach

By Ron Smith  
April 1, 2025

(SANTA BARBARA, Calif.) Westmont Director of Athletics Robert Ruiz has announced the hiring of Justin Leslie as the head coach of the men's basketball program. He becomes the 17th head coach in what will be the program's 85th season next year.

"I am thrilled to welcome Justin and his family to the Westmont community," said Ruiz. "I have had the opportunity to work with him in the past and have continued to watch his growth and development as a highly successful basketball coach in the West Region."

Leslie comes to Westmont with a career coaching record of 352-201 (.637). For the last six seasons, he has served as the head coach at Midwestern State (Texas). Last season, the Mustangs posted a record of 23-8 and reached the semifinals of the South Central Regional.

Prior to Midwestern State, Leslie was the head coach at Azusa Pacific University for 12 years, beginning in the 2007-08 season. At Azusa he amassed a record of 266-121 and won two conference titles. With Leslie at the helm, the Cougars reached the NCAA Division II Elite Eight in 2014-15. His 2009-10 team was the NAIA National Runner-up. He was twice named the PacWest Coach of the Year. In 2015, Leslie was honored as the West Regional Coach of the Year.

"Professionally, going to Midwestern State was amazing," said Leslie. "The Lone Star Conference has been great. However, missionally, I am excited about the opportunity to be at a place like Westmont where I am going to be able to incorporate the whole of who I am much more."

"At Midwestern State, we had the largest Fellowship of Christian Athletes' huddle in the state of Texas. God put me there for a time and a purpose that I am eternally grateful for. Now, I believe my family and I are more equipped to come back into a Christian setting and community with a greater perspective of how we can coach and lead in a God-honoring, excellent way. Westmont has always stood for and represented excellence, and I'm thrilled to be a part of this experience and to contribute to its legacy."

"While his basketball accomplishments are noteworthy, I am most excited about his well-rounded coaching philosophy and his alignment with our mission at Westmont," said Ruiz. "Coaching is his ministry and I am confident that our student-athletes will grow in all facets of their lives under Justin's leadership."

"He is a proven winner at the Division II level who knows what it takes to compete on a national scale. He is meticulous in the details and a relentless worker. Great things lie ahead for our basketball program and I trust that he will develop young men on and off the court."

"What I saw from a distance this last several years in Westmont is fantastic leadership and vision. Something is happening here at Westmont and has great momentum that is uncommon and I'm excited to now be a part of it. It starts at the top with President Beebe and his commitment to athletics. I have also seen it in Dave Odell, who I have known for a long time, and now Robert Ruiz, with whom I have a long history. I see it in the other coaches that have been brought in. This is not just a basketball program, but an athletic program that is poised for a unique spot and contribution to sports in NCAA Division II – and not just in the West Region. My goals are national. My goals are to be a player right away in the West Region of NCAA Division II. That is what I am

Westmont College

Westmont College is an undergraduate, residential, Christian, liberal arts community serving God's kingdom by cultivating thoughtful scholars, grateful servants and faithful leaders for global engagement with the academy, church and world. Westmont fields 17 NAIA teams that compete in the Golden State Athletic Conference (GSAC), the Pacific Coast Swim Conference (PCSC) and the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA). The Warriors have garnered nine national championships and have earned 100 GSAC titles since the inception of the conference in 1986.

coming for. The vision that the leadership has aligns perfectly with where I want to go and how I want to do it in a God-honoring way."

Leslie first became acquainted with the Santa Barbara community when he attended a Pat Riley basketball camp at UC Santa Barbara as a seventh grader. "Growing up in the Inland Empire, Santa Barbara was known to be among the best in programs." like-as-good-as-it-gets."

As a high school student, he was being recruited by a Gaucho assistant coach. When that did not work out, the coach pointed him to Azusa Pacific University.

Like so many student-athletes, Leslie found his college experience to be formative.

"My time in college is when I learned to value my faith," said Leslie. "I was around a Christian coach and his wife (Bill and Gayle Odell) who completely shaped my life. I met my wife, and I discovered the values and benefits of a Christian worldview in higher education and what that can do to set a young man up for success, personally and as an athlete, through this college basketball experience."

Asked what Warrior fans will notice about his team, Leslie replied, "The first thing they are going to see are teams that are going to compete in the details. A casual fan might not know what those details are, but they know when they see players laying it all on the line with all that they have. One of the pillars of our program is going to be competing. But also, they are going to see a team that is united. They are going to support each other and there is going to be that contagious, positive energy that emanates throughout.

"Unfortunately, the game is becoming far too transactional. I am not going to sacrifice the transformational nature of how I want to coach, how I want to recruit student-athletes and the relationships I want to have with them. I don't want to have a two-, three-, or four-year relationship with players. I want a 40-year relationship. I want to be at their weddings and big moments in their lives. I want to be someone they can always call. Finding that is becoming increasingly difficult in this day and age.

"When you look at the transfer portal and players chasing NIL, that is not the place I choose to reside. It is not the type of team I am looking to build. I am looking for young men who want to be a part of something bigger than themselves."

The same desire informs the relationship he wants to culminate with Westmont alumni. "Every time a Westmont alumnus comes back to a game, a practice, or to be in the locker room, I want them to be proud of what they see on the court. I want them to be proud of the young men who occupy the spaces that they were shaped within. That is something I am very excited about."

"Our men's basketball program has such a rich history and a tradition of excellence," said Ruiz. "So many incredible coaches and student-athletes have come through Murchison Gym. It is my hope and expectation that as we focus on the program's development as a contender in NCAA Division II basketball, we also continue to grow the partnerships and relationships that have sustained this program over its lifetime. I am confident that Justin brings the right balance of leadership, organization and strategic vision to accomplish these goals."

"One of the things I know about a school like Westmont, is that there is a shared responsibility and ownership," expressed Leslie. "It is long-term partnerships. I want current players to understand that there are players and coaches who came before who are now paying it forward. That same expectation is going to be for them when they finish at Westmont. I intend to offer an invitation for every alumnus or booster that wants to, to be able to connect with me. Honoring the history of this program and the people that came before us is something that we will aim to do. I am grateful for the opportunity to be a part of that process."

Leslie and his wife, Joy, have three children.