

Vallejo's Basketball Legacy Deserves Its Place in History

Thirty years later, Lewis "L.J." Lowe IV reflects on a rare direct path to Division I, the coach and teammates who shaped his journey, and the lessons he now brings to Royal Lifestyle Group.

Armstrongs silence crowd



■ Vallejo guards lead Apaches to Big Game win over old school before overflow crowd at Hogan

By Jack Bungart
Assistant sports editor

The assorted boo-birds at Grove Gym on Wednesday night won't want to hear this, much less admit it, but the difference between seven straight Hogan High School victories and one resounding Vallejo victory seemed clear enough.

In a word, Armstrong. Both of 'em. Senior guard Delvin Armstrong scored 20

points and brother and fellow Hogan transfer Brandon added 15 as the Apaches snapped a seven-game losing streak to the Spartans with an 80-69 win in front of a standing-room only crowd on the Hogan campus.

"Those two guys were so psyched up for this," said second-year Vallejo coach Vic Wallace, celebrating his first win in this intra-city boys basketball rivalry. "They were so hyped up to get out there, but they did a great job settling down when the time came."

While some 100 or so disgruntled fans — many of them ticket holders — were denied admission and left to stew in the rain outside, the Apaches (16-3) finally did heat things up enough to secure their hold on a first place in the Monticello Empire League at 6-1, while sending the Spartans (8-13) to 3-4.

What's left of last year's Hogan No. 2 Joaquin Section Division 1 semifinalists could be excused for wondering what might have been as they watched sophomore Brandon calmly dish off to open teammates when he wasn't hitting seven of his 11 shots, or senior Delvin add to his all-MEL credentials of a year ago going 8-for-12 from the field and pulling down a game-high 11 rebounds.

As for the fans, well, so much for

that pre-game box strategy.

"Oh man, I've heard all that, the traitor talk and everything, for over a year now," smiled Delvin. "That doesn't bother me at all. There were a lot of emotions coming into this, but once we got out there, we couldn't even hear it."

The Armstrongs, with some considerable assistance, finally silenced the Hogan crowd and the Spartans in the third quarter. A pair of free throws from Brandon gave Vallejo its first double-digit lead at 41-31 with 4:55 left, and a Delvin jumper pushed it above 10 for the first time at 49-38 with 2:26 left.

So complete, so undeniably sweet was the moment, Delvin let out a rare burst of emotion, yelling out loud after one jumper, and chest-bumping his brother after Brandon's 3-point play pushed it to 59-44 with 20 seconds left in the third.

Hogan coach Foster Hicks, however, was too busy searching for ways to stop the Apaches to busy himself with Big Game storylines.

"I told the guys in the locker room not to concern themselves too much with Delvin and Brandon," said Hicks. "Those are very key players for them, but there are other good players out there for Vallejo. ... I'm flattered. As Delvin Armstrong took pleasure in pointing out, 'we all had monstrous games.'"

There was senior forward La-Lowe, throwing down a vicious one-handed jam en route to 13 points, a 6-foot-10 sophomore center Wesly Wilson having a coming out party sorts with 15 points.

"That had to be Wesley's big game of the year," said Wallace. "He's getting better and better, and that's the scary thing. Teams are going to have to find a way to stop him."

That's easier said than done.

Vallejo's L.J. Lowe puts a punctuation mark on the Apaches' win over Hogan with this monster second-quarter dunk.

Times-Herald/Mike Jory

Vallejo, California Oct 23, 2026 (Issuewire.com) - Lewis "L.J." Lowe IV is revisiting his place in Vallejo High School basketball history through preserved newspaper clippings, a scouting profile, photographs, and personal recollections. A member of the Class of 1996, Lowe recalls committing to Jacksonville University before his senior season and signing his scholarship paperwork shortly after the season ended.

For Lowe, reaching Division I represented years of preparation, a move from Southern California, and the pressure to prove himself in a basketball culture where earning a scholarship carried enormous expectations.

Thirty years later, he wants that journey documented alongside the contributions of Coach Victor "Vic" Wallace and the teammates who helped make Vallejo a contender.

A rare direct path to Division I

Lowe's research to date identifies four Vallejo High School graduates who received NCAA Division I men's basketball scholarships directly out of high school: Jerald Jones to UCLA, Lewis "L.J." Lowe IV to Jacksonville University, Brandon Armstrong to Pepperdine, and Damany Hendrix to Gonzaga.

Contemporary recruiting coverage reports UCLA signing Jones from Vallejo High in 1984, and UCLA's 1984–85 roster lists him as a freshman from the school. Saint Mary's official biography of coach Randy Bennett credits Bennett with recruiting Armstrong from Vallejo High to Pepperdine in 1998, while contemporary reporting confirms Armstrong's scholarship.

Published biographical material states that Hendrix accepted a Gonzaga scholarship upon graduating from Vallejo High. Reporting from October 1998 identifies him as a Gonzaga freshman. Lowe's preserved Jacksonville newspaper photograph identifies him as a university basketball player, supporting his account of reaching that program.

This research count concerns Vallejo High School specifically. It covers graduates who received Division I basketball scholarships directly from high school, excluding routes through junior college, postgraduate prep school, or graduation from another high school. Lowe welcomes additional school records and contemporary reporting that could confirm or expand the count.

The wider city also has its own milestones. In 2020, Dishon Jackson signed with Washington State, with contemporary reporting identifying him as St. Patrick–St. Vincent's first boys basketball player to sign with a Division I program directly out of high school.

Lowe remembers his own 1996 scholarship as ending a lengthy drought at Vallejo High following Jones's departure for UCLA. He believes the rarity of those opportunities makes preserving the history—and recognizing Wallace's contribution—especially important.

A foundation built in Southern California

Lowe's basketball development began well before his arrival in Vallejo. He recalls playing for Slam N Jam in eighth grade alongside Corey Benjamin, who later reached the NBA, and Ortege Jenkins, who went on to play quarterback at the University of Arizona and pursue professional football. A preserved team photograph accompanies his recollections of those early years.

His high school path included Lynwood and Artesia before his move to Vallejo. In the Times-Herald feature "No Lowe expectations for L.J.," correspondent Eric Pinkela described Lowe's Los Angeles roots and experience playing with the O'Bannon brothers and Toby Bailey.

Lowe also recalls playing with the K-Swiss Pacers during his junior AAU season, including the 1995 Las Vegas Classic, alongside future NBA players Kevin Garnett, Paul Pierce, and Baron Davis under coach Mike Lewis.

He remembers the expectations surrounding that era in direct terms: "Go D1 or go home." Moving away from Southern California intensified his determination to show that he belonged at that level.

The newspaper record captures the player

Pinkela's Athlete of the Week feature reported that Lowe's scoring and leadership helped Vallejo begin

the season 4–1. It credited him with averaging 18 points at the Lionel Rodgers Tournament, earning all-tournament recognition, and helping the Apaches finish third.

“He’s been a huge asset,” Wallace told the newspaper.

The article’s continuation described Lowe’s influence on a team whose players came from different backgrounds. It reported that he encouraged teammates to build relationships away from the court and helped guide younger players, including sophomore Wesley Wilson and the team’s freshmen.

“He’s a major influence on the younger kids,” Wallace said.

The feature also recorded Lowe’s emphasis on education. Even while aspiring to professional basketball, he identified earning a degree as his first priority.

An earlier Times-Herald preview, “New coach has Vallejo up to the challenge,” by Eric Burney, introduced Lowe as a junior transfer from Artesia. Wallace described him as an explosive scorer and anticipated significant performances ahead.

Those articles place Lowe’s arrival within Wallace’s effort to rebuild Vallejo through structure, teamwork, and discipline.

Dunks that made their way into print

The preserved coverage records Lowe’s athleticism through specific game moments.

In “Spartans’ experience causes problems for Vallejo in opener,” correspondent Rob Burns described Lowe taking an outlet pass from Kiko Griffin and dunking for an early Vallejo lead against Hogan.

The continuation preserved Hogan coach Foster Hicks’s reaction: “I got scared for a moment, when (Lowe) slam-dunked the ball early in the game.”

Hogan ultimately won that contest 63–52, but the opening dunk remained part of the newspaper’s account.

Later, in Jack Bungart’s “Armstrongs silence crowd,” Lowe appeared in a large photograph above a caption identifying his “monster second-quarter dunk” during Vallejo’s 80–69 victory over Hogan.

The article credited Lowe with 13 points and a forceful one-handed jam. Delvin Armstrong scored 20, Brandon Armstrong added 15, and Wesley Wilson contributed 15 as Vallejo ended a seven-game losing streak against its rival.

Another preserved article, “Apaches make ratings stand up,” dated January 11, 1996, reported Vallejo’s 68–51 victory over Vacaville. The Apaches improved to 13–2 overall and took sole possession of first place in the Monticello Empire League. Lowe contributed 13 points.

Together, the stories document individual performances within the larger account of Vallejo’s progress.

A talented team worth remembering

Lowe wants the recognition to extend to the teammates who made that period memorable.

He remembers Brandon Armstrong directing the offense at point guard and Delvin Armstrong providing scoring from the backcourt. Hamid Lewis brought a European style of play from Switzerland that, in Lowe's recollection, made the team tougher.

Marcel Longmire could contribute on the wing or in the post and played with heart. Wesley Wilson supplied size and an inside presence that gave Vallejo another dimension.

Broderick Jones brought exceptional jumping ability and shot-blocking instincts. Milo Lewis provided depth at point guard and a spiritually disciplined presence, often praying with the team and helping keep teammates grounded.

Lowe also recognizes Norman Goco and Kiko Griffin, whose contributions appear in the earlier newspaper coverage of Wallace's program.

His recollection is of a talented group whose story deserves to be remembered collectively, with Wallace's coaching central to its development.

The preserved scouting profile

An undated scouting profile in Lowe's collection describes his ability to score at the basket, shoot from outside, move without the ball, rebound, and finish above the rim. It praises his quick hands and anticipation in passing lanes while identifying ballhandling, boxing out, and involving teammates as areas for improvement.

For 1995-96, the profile lists averages of 24 points, eight rebounds, five assists, three steals, and two blocks, with a .467 three-point shooting percentage. Those figures are presented as recorded in the preserved profile.

Its awards section lists first-team All-City and All-Area honors, four Vallejo Times prep-player-of-the-week selections, a No. 1 Northern California designation attributed to Premier Preps Scouting Report, and tenth-grade Hoop Scoop top-20 recognition.

The profile also compares aspects of Lowe's game to Kobe Bryant's while noting differences in fluidity—an evaluator's assessment preserved in the document.

Historical materials contain varying height listings. Lowe recalls being approximately 6-foot-6 and remembers inflated roster heights as common in basketball at the time.

From Vallejo to Jacksonville

Lowe identifies Jacksonville assistant coach Jim Dolan as the recruiter who helped bring him to the university under head coach George Scholz.

A preserved Jacksonville newspaper photograph, titled "New view for JU," identifies L.J. Lowe on the university's basketball floor, providing another contemporary piece of his college story.

Lowe says his college career encountered an eligibility setback during his first season and that he later went on to play in Mexico. He considers those experiences, including the disappointments, essential to an honest account of his journey.

Today, Lowe applies those lessons as founder and CEO of LJI Family Enterprises Inc., doing business as Royal Lifestyle Group. The discipline, teamwork, competitive pressure, and setbacks he experienced in basketball continue to shape how he approaches building his company.

For Lowe, that means bringing the same preparation and persistence to business that once helped him pursue a Division I opportunity. His ambition now is to build lasting brands and create opportunities beyond the basketball court.

Lowe hopes his collection encourages former players, coaches, families, and local journalists to preserve Vallejo basketball history through original reporting, photographs, and accurately documented milestones.

The original newspaper clippings, scouting profile, photographs, and personal recollections are available for editorial review.

Media contact
Lewis “L.J.” Lowe IV
Lewis.l@royallifestylegroup.com

[illegible]

Royal Lifestyle Group

*****@royallifestylegroup.com

(888)218-0018

637 W. Hillside Ave. Unit C5

<https://www.royallifestylegroup.com>

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