

ABE WOLDESLASSIE

Head Men's Basketball Coach
Macalester College



Abraham Woldelessie, a 2004 NEXT scholar and a high school graduate of Saint Thomas Academy, was named the head basketball coach last spring at his alma mater, Macalester College in Saint Paul. Abe spent the previous 10 years forging a career path far from home, with a dream of becoming a collegiate basketball head coach one day. His coaching journey took him up and down the Atlantic seaboard and he served as an assistant at Bowdoin College, Dartmouth College, Davidson College, and Siena College, before Macalester called him home.

MinneapolisNEXT recently sat down with Coach Abe for a conversation:

What is your backstory?

My dad moved to Minnesota in the 70's, during the 30-year war between Eritrea and Ethiopia. My parents were married in Minneapolis and I was born in Minneapolis in 1985. My mom passed away from breast cancer when I was 4 and my dad raised me as a single parent. He worked as a registered nurse in Minneapolis and did everything he could to give me a better life than he had. He is my hero.

Where did you grow up in the city?

I grew up on Clinton Avenue in South Minneapolis, not far from Phelps Park. Phelps has been a longtime partner of MinneapolisNEXT and the park staff is doing great work for families in the community.

How were you introduced to MinneapolisNEXT and what does it mean to you to be involved with the program as a director?

I was invited to go to a NEXT-sponsored summer camp program in middle school. Eventually, I applied and was awarded a NEXT high school scholarship.

It is an honor to join the NEXT board. Moving back to Minneapolis has allowed me to be more hands-on with our organization and we will be able to help more kids in the Twin Cities. Rex Holland has been a longtime mentor for me and I am excited to help the next generation of NEXT scholars.

Do you think NEXT is hitting the target? What can the program do to be better?

NEXT is doing a great job helping students in the Twin Cities, but there is more work to be done. Low income students deserve the chance to receive a high-quality education. NEXT does a tremendous job with providing families the opportunity to send their children to excellent schools. At NEXT, we need to continue to develop relationships with donors and let them know more about the work that we are doing.

How do you see yourself as a leader? What guides you?

Leadership is not only leading by example, but by bringing people along with you. Leadership is helping others before ourselves. There is a quote by Kofi Annan that I think of often. "To live is to choose. But to choose well, you must know who you are and what you stand for. Where you are going, and why you want to get there." We have choices each day that affect not only us, but those around us. I have been so fortunate in my life and it is only right that I do all I can to help those in need.