

# American Heritage sophomore sparks Patriots to exciting win over Rockwell

BY Jared Lloyd DAILY HERALD | [Feb 1, 2022](#)



*American Heritage freshman Merceius Mili attempts to shoot over the defense during the Region 18 game against Rockwell in American Fork on Tuesday, Feb. 1, 2022. (Jared Lloyd, Daily Herald)*

American Heritage sophomore Anne Marie Gibbs certainly doesn't fit the mold of the typical basketball player.

At about five-feet tall, she is almost always the smallest person on the court and her height hasn't been always easy for her to deal with.

"It's been hard sometimes," Gibbs said Tuesday night. "I would get teased about it in middle school, but that helped me embrace my shortness and find my strengths."

She didn't start the 2021-22 season on the Patriot varsity team but American Heritage head coach Paora Winitana said only needed to see how she played defense to decide she could be an asset for the varsity squad.

"I saw her at tryouts and then how relentless she was and her defensive presence," Winitana said. "We always say that defense leads to offense, so we felt she could help us. She has become one of our best defenders."

In Tuesday night's Region 18 showdown against Rockwell, however, they needed even more from the sophomore.

With a number of Patriot players in foul trouble in a game where the Marshalls had a 3-point lead in the fourth quarter, American Heritage needed her to be big at both ends.

And she answered the call.

Gibbs drained a 3-pointer from the corner to tie the game, got behind the Rockwell defense for a layup, hit another jump shot and nailed another 3-pointer to go on a personal 10-0 run to give the Patriots a lead they wouldn't surrender.

The Marshalls tried to rally by forcing a couple of turnovers late but American Heritage got one final bucket and managed to run out the clock to secure the dramatic 39-35 victory.

Winitana said he warned Gibbs and the other Patriot bench players that they might be needed.

"I pulled them over at halftime and said that at some point it might be their turn," Winitana said. "I told them whoever it was to be fearless and give it your best. And Anne Marie was fearless out there."

Gibbs said she felt that being able to come out in that key stretch and score as well as play defense was big for her. She also said it felt amazing to get all of the support from her team.

"I really wanted to be on varsity and it was big for me to be able to help out," Gibbs said. "It made me super-happy. All the girls really made me feel welcomed."

It wasn't an easy victory for American Heritage, who trailed 11-2 at the end of the first quarter and 30-22 at the end of the third period.

Each time, however, the Patriots found ways to rally.

"We tried to prepare them for the ebbs and flows of the game," Winitana said. "Out shots weren't falling tonight but our style is to defend, rebound and run. We didn't do all of those well but we did enough."

Gibbs said she feels like these moments are ones she can remember and draw strength from when things are hard. That's something she advises anyone who like her who might be shorter or feel uncomfortable.

"You have to push through and remember the small moments that brighten your day," she said. "You have to embrace that you have strengths and weaknesses and let that make you stronger."

American Heritage is 9-7 and fighting for a playoff spot, but Winitana sees a lot of great potential from his team both on and off the court.

“We are a young team and I’m excited to see where we will be at, the future of the program,” he said. “I also love seeing their potential after they finish playing basketball. They are learning important lessons about toughness, togetherness, discipline and love that will help them throughout their lives.”



*American Heritage senior Bailey Tillman shoots the ball during the Region 18 game against Rockwell in American Fork on Tuesday, Feb. 1, 2022. (Jared Lloyd, Daily Herald)*



American Heritage sophomore Megan Pierce drives to the basket during the Region 18 game against Rockwell in American Fork on Tuesday, Feb. 1, 2022. (Jared Lloyd, Daily Herald)



American Heritage head coach Paora Winitana discusses a call with the officials during the Region 18 game against Rockwell in American Fork on Tuesday, Feb. 1, 2022. (Jared Lloyd, Daily Herald)