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RAMSEUR - Only two of the Piedmont Athletic Conference teams earned the right to enter this week's state tournament coming off victories. After a tough stretch of games also known as the Piedmont Athletic Conference Tournament, the Randleman High School girls team and the Eastern Randolph boys teams added tournament championships to their resumes, which already included the regular season titles. The tournament title wins came Friday night in front of a jammed gymnasium at Eastern Randolph High School.

Randleman's girls captured a thrilling 57-55 overtime win over second seeded Eastern Randolph, while the ER boys recorded a hard-fought 74-64 victory over third-seeded Trinity. All four of those teams will be getting ready for the state 2-A tournament, which begins Tuesday.

The Randleman girls, whose only loss this year came to Southwestern Randolph during the Davidson-Randolph Christmas Classic, responded after trailing by four in overtime, finishing the game when Elizabeth York hit some crucial free throws in the overtime's final minute of action.



The Randleman Tigers (24-1) following their overtime win in the PAC Tournament Championship against ERHS. Photo provided.

"I don't know how we won that game," RHS coach Brandon Varner said after he recorded his 100th career coaching victory and the Tigers improved to 24-1 on the season. "I told the girls

every emotion they felt after that game, they deserve it. From joy to excitement to happiness. This game could have easily gone the other way. They could have had a tremendous letdown, getting a big lead, losing that big lead, being down by four in overtime. To win a conference tournament game on their home court with their boys and girls teams playing. What a great night and a great accomplishment. We had to earn it and that is what you want. They felt a sense of accomplishment that they really earned it."

Now as the conference tournament switches over to the state tournament, the Tigers will enter Monday's practice with even more confidence after the tournament championship win.

"There really was no panic, no scrambling, no chaos," Varner said about the huddles during the heart-stopping finish. "It was like we had been there before. Most of these girls played Kinston in the fourth round and played Shelby in the fourth round. Our seniors came through."

Gracyn Hall scored 21 points and added a key block late, while Jordan Booker and York finished with 15 points each.



It was Standing Room Only for the finals of the PAC Basketball Tournament at Eastern Randolph High School.

Even if the Tigers entered practice Monday without a PAC Tournament championship, Varner said they would have been fine.

"I thought about what would happen both ways," Varner said. "What would happen if we won and what would happen if we didn't. You learn from it, regroup and now it's win or go home. The girls are experienced. Either way, I felt we would be OK. Because we have been there and done that."

The ER boys have "done that" most of the season. After a season opening setback, the Wildcats captured 19 straight wins. A loss to Southwestern Randolph would be the only conference setback as the Wildcats then won five straight, including the tournament title win over Trinity. Timothy Brower scored 28 points for ER, while DaVonte Brooks scored 20 and Connor Carter added 12 key points. Jani Norwood was also a big contributor.

"It was a huge feat that we have been working all season to accomplish," said ER coach Johnny Thomas. "A lot of people looked at us in the beginning and said we wouldn't do a lot. We knew what expectations we had for ourselves and to win the regular season and then the tournament championship means the world."

The way the Wildcats have been able to post victories of late impresses Thomas. ER broke the 80-point barrier 16 times this season, the 90-point barrier 11 times and even scored 103 points in a game against Western Harnett. Teams are making adjustments and the Wildcats are adjusting as well. ER used strong defensive efforts in recording victories in the second half of the conference season.



The Wildcats (24-2) assemble for a group photo after their PAC Tournament Championship win against Trinity. Photo from ERHS social media.

"Winning gives us confidence," Thomas said. "Everyone knows we like to run, run, run and run. The last five or six games we haven't been able to run. They pack it in and play zone. We had to make adjustments. We can play half court basketball as well. And when we play half court, the other team has to figure out if we're going to take threes, drive to the basket or win with rebounding."

Now we're at the point of the season where it's one-and-done and the only real victory is to advance.

"There's two types of teams now," Thomas said. "There's a lazy team and there's a confident and superior team. That win was huge for us and we should absolutely be ready. We don't want to underestimate anyone. The only team that can beat us is us."

The Randleman girls and Eastern Randolph boys have certainly been tested this PAC season. Now they hope that translates into a long stay in the state tournament.