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ASHEBORO - Most high school basketball coaches like to divide the season into segments with the emphasis of working hard to achieve success in each segment.

There's the pre-conference season, the holiday tournament and conference season. Three specific segments of the season, one really not affecting the others except for a mental advantage and motivation to either continue that strong showing in the first and second segments or make adjustments to turn things around for that third segment.

Southwestern Randolph High School girls varsity basketball coach Seth Baxter hasn't had to make many adjustments this season. His team has met and conquered every challenge to date.

After going unbeaten in the non league season, winning the championship of the SportsTone.net Christmas Invitational and then finishing off an impressive undefeated season in the Piedmont Athletic Conference, the Cougars entered PAC Tournament action this week a perfect 24-0.



Southwestern Randolph looks to continue their undefeated season this week.



SWR juniors Jordin George (left) and Maddie Strider.

Except for Randleman finishing the 2021-22 season at 20-0 and Asheboro High School's unbeaten 11-0 regular-season record during the shortened 2020-21 Covid19 season, those asked could not remember a high school basketball team in Randolph County finishing an entire regular season unbeaten.

"I didn't see it coming," Baxter said of the totally dominating and unbeaten season. "But this is a great group of kids I've been working with since they were second or third grade all the way up and I knew they were special. They trust each other, they trust me. Last year when Caressa (King) went down with an injury, we had to change our identity on the fly. I remember leaving East Burke (after a second-round state playoff loss)

thinking this group right here had a chance to be special. Just the way they were able to fight their way through adversity of losing her and knowing we were still coming together."

After a summer of hard work and playing teams away from Randolph County, Baxter said his team continued to improve.

"We got better and really connected," he said. "I can go on forever about who they are and how they have never been complacent, how much they value self improvement, trust each other and trust me. They have such a positive attitude and that breeds a positive environment."

The Cougars started the season and games weren't even close. Their first five and six of their first seven wins were by at least 40 points, which meant a running clock. Twelve-point wins over Williams and Randleman would be the least margin of victory for the Cougars until a 39-33 win over Mount Pleasant on January 25. Two weeks later, Wheatmore was within five points at 44-39 when the final horn sounded, meaning the Cougars had won a total of nine games by at least 40 points with only three teams staying within single digits by the end of the game.

The Cougars averaged 57.5 points per game and allowed an average of just 29.4, an average margin of victory of a whopping 28.1 points per game. There certainly weren't many fans sitting on the edge of their seats this season.

When the Cougars played the final regular season game of the year against East Davidson Wednesday, Baxter admitted he talked to his team about finishing undefeated.

"I told them there may be a team sometime down the road that equals what they could do, but there will never be a team to break it," Baxter said. "That is the first time we discussed it during the regular season."

SWR earned a 55-31 win for their 24th straight victory.

The Cougars are led by Maddie Strider, a sharp-shooting junior ball-handling wizard who sees the floor as well as anyone; Jordin George, a sleek, athletic junior speedster who can drive, shoot and rebound; the most improved player in the county in senior Macy Allred; and the inside presence of seniors Gracie Hodgkin and Kenzie Martin, both of whom can take over games in stretches. The starters are supported admirably by Camryn Everhart, Nauttica Parrish and Ryleigh Hinline.

The remainder of the squad plays key roles in practice.

We talk a lot about five words," Baxter said. "Be fearless, be relentless, be observant and be resilient. "The key to this group is not having to depend on one person. They are so unselfish and they don't care who scores and who gets the credit. I am just enjoying the ride. It's an honor being their coach and I enjoy going to practice every day."



Three seniors with starting roles: (from top) Kenzie Martin, Macy Allred and Gracie Hodgkin.