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By Dennis Garcia

SportsTone.net

ASHEBORO - To say the Southwestern Randolph High School girls basketball team hadn't been tested through their first nine games of the season may be a harsh understatement. After a 36-point win over Chatham Charter in the opening round of the SportsTone.net Christmas Invitational, the Cougars were a perfect 9-0 with seven of those wins coming by at least 40 points and another by 36. So SWR coach Seth Baxter had yet to see his team perform in a tight situation.

He was able to see that during the semifinals and finals of the tournament as the Cougars found themselves in battles against Williams and then Randleman for the championship and the Cougars came away from both with impressive performances.

Maddie Strider scored 14 points and Macy Allred added 10 as the Cougars grabbed an early lead and held off a couple of charges by the Tigers for a 42-30 win in the title game Saturday night at Asheboro High School.

That win came after a 55-43 victory over Williams in the semifinals. Still not needing crucial plays late with the game on the line, the contests were certainly closer than the first nine wins of the season.

"We talked about how fortunate we have been to win the games we have won," said SWR coach Seth Baxter, whose team has now won six of the past seven holiday tournaments.

"Eventually, we will be in a dogfight. (Saturday) night was like a heavyweight boxing fight. At times, it wasn't a pretty game. It was two teams going after each other in a championship environment."

The Cougars, who never trailed in the game, jumped out to an early lead and staved off a couple of rallies by the Tigers, who were hoping to avenge a 42-25 loss to the Cougars back on Dec. 20.

"We were tested against Williams," Baxter said. "You can't simulate that in practice. We handled the adversity with different girls stepping up and that was great to see. Give Randleman a lot of credit. They have some senior veterans and we knew they would be ready."

SWR led 7-4 after the first quarter and 19-12 at halftime before both teams found their offense. RHS freshman Jacqueline McDaniel scored 11 of her 19 points in the third quarter, but after the Tigers had pulled to within 22-20 with just over 4 minutes to play in the third, Strider and Jordin George, who was named the most valuable player, nailed back-to-back 3-pointers to extend the lead to 28-20.

"We definitely played a lot better than the first time we played them," RHS coach Scott Tyson said. "We didn't quit at all. The last time we played them they shot 28 free throws and we made 24 turnovers. (Saturday) night we mostly played to the expectations we have."

RHS (7-5) closed to within 28-22 after three quarters and when Gracie Beane nailed a 3-pointer early in the fourth quarter, the Tigers had drawn to within 28-25. But Allred, who had an outstanding overall game for SWR, hit two free throws after Gracie Hodgkin had hit one and Camryn Everhart added a basket for a 33-25 lead with about four minutes to play.

"We're blessed we have a lot of girls that can do things inside," Baxter said, calling Allred the X factor. "I thought she had a great tournament. Maddie is a gamer. Jordin had 15 rebounds. The thing about these girls is no matter who is on the court, they all rebound and they all defend."

The Cougars allowed just five points over the final seven minutes of action.

"Most importantly, we played together as a team," George said. "Everyone knew their part. (Being named MVP) definitely means a lot to me. I felt like as a team we all did our part. I put a lot of work into it, but it's working together as a team."

Strider had 14 points, Allred 10 and Hodgkin seven for SWR.

McDaniel's 19 led everyone.

"It's been a process for her," Tyson said of his very talented freshman. "I made a promise to her when I first met her that she was going to have to work hard and earn everything. The best thing I can do as a coach is make her work. This was only her second start all season. She is working hard in games and she's special to watch."



2024 Tournament Champion Cougars from Southwestern Randolph. Photo by PJ Ward-Brown.

MOST VALUABLE PLAYER

Jordin George - Southwestern Randolph

ALL-TOURNAMENT TEAM

Maddie Strider - Southwestern Randolph

Macy Allred - Southwestern Randolph

Chenleigh Robinson - Randleman

Jacqueline McDaniel - Randleman

Makayla Bobo - Lexington

Mi'Keina Springfield - Williams

Mauri Jerman - Eastern Guilford

Leneane Scherer - Asheboro

Madison Hill - Trinity

Peyton York - Chatham Charter

SPORTSMANSHIP AWARD

Malaika Khan – Asheboro



All-Tournament selections (L-R): Chenleigh Robinson, Jackie McDaniel, Peyton York, Maddie Hill, Laneane Scherer, Mauri Jerman, Maddie Strider, Macy Allred and MVP Jordin George. Not pictured: Makayla Bobo, Mi'Keina Springfield and Sportsmanship Award winner Malaika Khan. Photo by PJ Ward-Brown.