

January 6, 2020

By Dennis Garcia
SportsTone.net

RANDLEMAN - One of the only problems with seeing a high school football team go deep into the NCHSAA state playoffs is its basketball team starts behind the eight ball. But at Randleman High School, boys varsity basketball coach Daniel Mitchell is getting used to starting the season a few weeks later than most other teams.

While other teams were able to begin the new basketball season the week before Thanksgiving, because the RHS varsity football team reached the regional championship game this past season, the Tigers basketball team didn't begin its season until Dec. 10. And with very little preparation.

But it sure doesn't look that way on the basketball court.

The Tigers swept through The Courier-Tribune Christmas Invitational, earning lopsided wins over Eastern Randolph, Providence Grove and Southwestern Randolph for the championship and then followed that up Friday with a 60-43 win over Montgomery Central. RHS is 8-1 overall, with the only setback coming in a one-point loss to Asheboro after a couple of made free throws with seconds left.

The Tigers had just a few workouts as a team prior to the start of the season, which was a Piedmont Athletic Conference clash with PG.

"There is a little bit of a rust factor, but the advantages outweigh the challenges in a lot of ways," Mitchell said about a quick turnaround from football to basketball and the low number of practices before the season starts. "Four of our starters played football and six of the first seven (in the rotation), so you have guys who know how to win and expect to win. That makes things a lot easier."

After earning their fourth overall The Courier-Tribune Christmas Invitational title and then topping Montgomery Central last week, the Tigers have an important five days with PAC road



Coach Daniel Mitchell addresses the Tigers during The Courier-Tribune Christmas Invitational at Asheboro High School. Photo by PJ Ward-Brown/PJ Ward-Brown Photography.

games at High Point Andrews on Tuesday and Trinity on Friday sandwiched around a road game at Ledford Wednesday.

The Tigers are primed and although it took a bit of time for even this group to transition from football conditioning to basketball conditioning, it appears the team is ready for the heavy schedule it is about to face.



Randleman senior Dominick Poole. Photo by PJ Ward-Brown/PJ Ward-Brown Photography

"In years past, we've had to have linemen-type guys having to get into basketball shape, but this year it's running backs and defensive backs and they are already well conditioned," Mitchell said. "We try and scrimmage every day, but it still takes a few games to get in game-shape. Luckily with this group of guys, they can be what we consider gassed and they are still able to play hard."

Still, the Tigers do a lot of learning on the fly.

"With limited practice time, there are times you have to figure things out on

the floor," Mitchell said. "These guys have been winning for two years. We've added some guys, but the core is back and they know how to win basketball games."

The core includes seniors Nate Green, Dominick Poole and Robbie Rich and juniors Connor Lineberry, Kaleb Mitchell and Nate Cassidy. Sophomore Naheim Lilly is also playing a key role.

That Randleman is winning games isn't surprising to Mitchell, he said. What may be surprising is how the Tigers are getting the job done. RHS has allowed just 370 points in its nine games, an average of 41 per game.

"The level we are playing defense is very good," Mitchell said. "We're able to score just enough without having our offense polished."

Only Asheboro has crossed the 50-point plateau against the Tigers.

"A lot of effort," Mitchell said about his team's defense. "It starts with wanting to play hard and you have to have talent. We can really pressure the ball with just about anyone. We can guard one through five with just about anyone. There may be a few mismatches out there, but there's really not a guy we can't put out there to guard someone."

At the Christmas tournament, the Tigers rolled 62-32 over ER, 62-43 over Providence Grove and 64-42 over the Cougars for their first title since 2016.

"It was neat for the seniors because they hadn't won it yet," Mitchell said. "Almost every senior class I have had has been able to at least play in the championship game. It was cool to play in front of such a big crowd."

With a number of practices this past week, the Tigers are starting to find answers for their team that opponents were able to figure out weeks ago.

"Every year, we have to make adjustments," Mitchell said. "This year, we have had more games than practices. We're in the midst of making those adjustments. We're finding out who is playing well, who our personnel is. Starting the season the way we do, we don't have time to tinker with it. We are trying to make adjustments now."

More bad news for Tigers' foes.



Kaleb Mitchell rises for a jump shot. Photo by PJ Ward-Brown/PJ Ward-Brown Photography