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TRINITY - In this day and age of high school sports, there is an unfortunate trend of talented young players switching schools in order to be on a team that is expected to be more successful. It seems that remaining at a school that is attempting to build a program is not the norm for any student-athlete in any sport.

But Trinity High School senior Autumn Gentry has bucked that trend. The all-around athlete who has been named all-conference in numerous sports, certainly could have left Trinity High School during her basketball career. Although she averaged 19.1 points per game her freshman season and 18 points per game her sophomore season, the Bulldogs were a combined 2-34 in those first two years. It was difficult for the Bulldogs to field a team as Coach Mike Sink had to go into classrooms to recruit girls so the team would have enough members.

Through all that, Gentry stayed and that patience and devotion is paying off as the Bulldogs are 11-9 heading into Friday's home game with Uwharrie Charter. The 11 wins marks the most victories in a season since the 2017-18 campaign when the Bulldogs finished 14-14 under Dana Conte. And leading the way has been Gentry, who has become one of the top scorers in the region. The guard has been averaging close to 20 points per game and her career total of nearly 1,500 points has set a school record.

"When she came in, she was one of those players you heard a lot about," said Sink, who is in his fifth season at the helm. "When she got here, she lived up to her hype. She was a good shooter and she was surrounded by good girls, but it wasn't a good basketball team. She stuck with us and her demeanor, attitude and work ethic...She has everything.

"I even told her after her freshman year, if you stay, I will be thrilled to death and if you leave, I will understand," Sink added. "She looked at me and said don't worry about me. I'm not going anywhere. That showed what type of character she had. She has stuck with us for four years."



Trinity senior Autumn Gentry. Photo by Blue Groove Photos.



Four-year starter and career scoring leader for the Bulldogs, Autumn Gentry. Photo by Blue Groove Photos.

Gentry admits there were times during her early years the thought of switching schools crept into her mind. But she said she knew what her goals were and she wanted to obtain those goals at Trinity High School.

"It did enter my mind quite a few times, but me and Coach Sink talked about some things and got stuff figured out," Gentry said. "I wanted to pass the career point mark, hit 1,000 points and keep doing me if our team was going to be there or not so we could have a good team for the next couple of years."

Character is exactly what she showed while she took those early bumps in her high school career. She was scoring plenty, but the team was struggling to find not only enough quality players but players in general. But Gentry said she knew there was some talent coming to Trinity her

junior year and she wanted to be a part of helping to turn around a program that had tasted very little success in recent seasons.

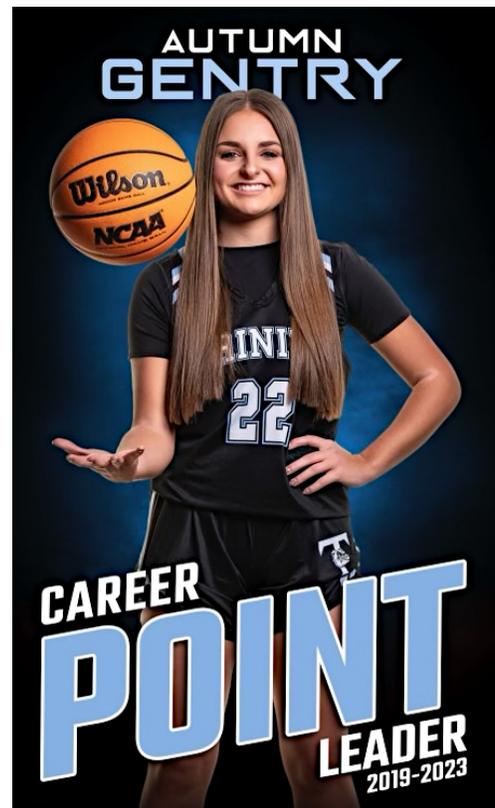
"I take a lot of pride in wanting to leave a mark on where I have been," Gentry said. "Coming from the middle school, it was a big change. I wanted to keep going because I knew better players were coming in. We actually have players who have played travel basketball and other kinds and not just people who have played in their driveways."

With Kennedy Jackson, Kaelyn Whitehart and others joining the Bulldogs the last two seasons, things have taken a positive turn. With Gentry averaging 18.6 points per game and Jackson adding nearly 10, the Bulldogs won five times in the 2021-22 season.

This year, the progression is easily seen as the Bulldogs won their season opener over Southern Guilford, lost to Oak Grove and then put together a four-game winning streak.

In a win over East Davidson earlier this season, Gentry broke the school scoring record of Jordan Parker, which was 1,252 points. Gentry has continued to widen that gap. Her last game was a 26-point effort in an overtime victory over Wheatmore.

"Over the past three or four years, she has got to the point where she understands the game more and knows what to do and where she has to be," Sink said. "She is a quiet leader and does everything she is supposed to do. Every year she has gotten better at



Autumn Gentry. Photo provided.

understanding the game. She has earned the respect of teams in this league and teams around the state."

It hasn't been easy, Gentry admits. But obtaining her long-term goals meant continuing to work hard and help others along the way.

"It's been a ride," said Gentry, who is the only senior on this year's team. "It has been hard some days, especially early on, but I want to get somewhere with basketball. I am going to play college at the next level (Bridgewater College in Virginia). I knew if I wanted to do that, I couldn't stop and needed to strive to get better every day."

She has, and with a talented group of young players joining her, so has the THS girls basketball program.