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RANDLEMAN - If someone would have told Randleman High School girls varsity basketball coach Brandon Varner in December and even as late as early January that his team was going to move into the Western Regional semifinals for the fourth straight year, that person would have been met with raised eyebrows.

Even entering the Davidson-Randolph Christmas Classic as an undefeated team, Varner admitted if the Tigers were going to reach those lofty playoff heights, a few things were going to have to change. The team was winning alright, but not in the way Varner said he needed to see each and every time the Tigers took the floor.



"If you told me back in December and even early January that this team would be sitting here in the Elite Eight, I didn't think we could be here," Varner said. "They got together as a team. The whole thing is they just came together. The effort improved and they started to play more unselfishly and play like a team. The whole vibe around the team got better."

The Tigers made the necessary changes and reached the regional semifinals, where they fell for the fourth straight year, this time to East Burke Tuesday night by a 49-42 score. The loss ended another spectacular season for the Tigers, who closed the campaign with a final 27-2 record.

That means in the past four seasons, all which ended in losses in the regional semifinals, the Tigers have a cumulative record of 88-10, an incredible turnaround since Varner took over the reins five years ago.

Looking in from the outside, things certainly looked well enough early on this season as the Tigers put games into the win column. Still, Varner said he knew there were changes that had to be made.

"It wasn't like a secret formula or anything," Varner said. "Elizabeth York even said it in an interview she had with someone. She said we started playing harder because it was embarrassing that we were playing just good enough to beat everyone because we knew we could. There were times we would have someone open for a pass and we would take a contested shot or not rotate defensively. Things just weren't clicking."

Randleman was having success on the court, with no team coming within 10 points during an 11-0 start entering the Davidson-Randolph Christmas Classic. RHS suffered its first loss to county-rival Southwestern Randolph in the championship game at the holiday event, but that seemed to breathe new life into the Tigers. RHS went on a 10-game winning streak to close the regular season, finishing the Piedmont Athletic Conference with a perfect 12-0 record for the third time in four years.



The Tigers following their 2023 PAC Tournament Championship. Photo provided.

A PAC Tournament championship was followed by playoff wins over Bandys, Hendersonville and East Rutherford.

"They have been ready to play the last month," Varner said. "They took the mentality that they just didn't want to lose. The effort they gave got so much better."

Varner credited the improvements of Gracie Beane and Jordan Booker as two key elements in finishing with another stellar finish to the season.

This senior class, which includes Booker, Grayson Hall, York and Gabi Carter, went 46-2 in league games during their illustrious high school career, a mark that very few programs across the entire state can match.

"It's been an incredible run for four years," Varner said. "I told them you will be able to look back and know that we made a lot of great memories. When you talk to your friends and your kids, you can come into this gym and see what they have done over the past four years and you can say you were a part of some really good basketball teams. That's going to hold a lot of value."