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ASHEBORO - If this was a normal high school spring sports season, Randleman High School's Matt Kemp would be racking up the strikeouts in helping lead the Tigers to another outstanding season.

If this was a normal high school spring sports season, Southwestern Randolph High School's Heaven Maness would be recording base hit after base hit as the Cougars fight for another league championship.

If this was a normal high school spring sports season, Asheboro High School's Easton Price would be enjoying, along with hundreds of student-athletes around Randolph County, his final season of prep competition.

But this is anything but a normal high school spring sports season as thousands of student-athletes in baseball, softball, track, golf, soccer and other sports are hoping against hope that somehow they will be able to once again compete in the sport they love before the entire spring sports season is shut down due to the coronavirus that caused the postponement of all high school sports on Mar. 14

"It's been tough," said Price, who has played baseball for the Blue Comets for four years. "You never thought this could happen. I wanted to go out strong my senior year. We had a pretty good team and good team chemistry. Now that's been taken out of our hands. All the hard work we put in the last semester and a half ... We are all trying to keep a positive attitude. We have all been hoping we will be able to come back. I honestly don't see it happening. I wish it would."



*Matt Kemp on the mound,
March 13, 2020.*

The North Carolina High School Athletic Association ordered all sports be suspended after games on Friday night, Mar. 13. Since those final outs were made, the final putt fell in the hole, the final track event was held and the final seconds ran off the clock, the sports venues throughout the state have been silent.

Kemp and the Tigers, who were expected to have another stellar campaign under the direction of Jake Smith, were 4-0 when the season was halted.

"It's really tough, it's hard to take your mind off it and think about other things," said Kemp, a pitcher who will play for the Wolfpack of N.C. State. "We thought this might happen. We really didn't want to think about it. It was still a shock and really upsetting."

The Tigers, who have been one of the most successful programs in the state in any sport over nearly a decade, have seven seniors on the team this season.

"We are all as upset as one another," Kemp said of all the RHS players. "Even the freshmen are upset. I have played with a lot of these guys since the sixth grade. We have to play it by ear, but I'm working like we're going to come back April 6."

Maness has been one of the most highly-decorated student-athletes in the county the past four seasons. She said it's a tough way to end her high school career.

"I didn't want to remember my senior year like it is now," Maness said. "I may never play softball again in high school and that is hard to think about. This is crazy. I didn't think this would happen. We didn't know this would be our last game (on Mar. 13). I thought we'd be out a week. This is my last year in high school and I won't ever get to do some things again."

Not only are the sports seasons in jeopardy, but it is unknown if students will return to the classroom before the end of the school year. A number of states have already declared the school year is over and if North Carolina follows that path, not only will all the sports be cancelled, but proms, graduation ceremonies and other school functions will also more than likely be cancelled.

"I would have never expected to skip graduation and miss out on the moment everyone talks about," said Price, who is heading to N.C. State for a degree in mechanical engineering. "It's obviously hard to accept and you can't put words on it. This is something bigger than you. I know all of this will help everyone in the long run."

But for now, it hurts.



Heaven Maness, April 25, 2019.