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RANDLEMAN - Chemistry is important in every high school sport, but especially in volleyball. Timing is such a crucial part of any team's offense and it takes time for a team that is counting on a number of new varsity players to build that chemistry.



Randleman High School volleyball coach Kerry Mitchell. Photo provided.

That is one of the reasons Randleman High School veteran volleyball coach Kerry Mitchell said she knew it would take time for her team to reach its full potential. Entering the season, Mitchell said she would be counting on a number of underclassmen and building a rapport with a solid core of returning players would take time.

Mitchell is hoping that time has arrived.

The Tigers certainly looked together last week as RHS earned a crucial victory over defending state 2-A champion Southwestern Randolph in Piedmont Athletic Conference action. The three-game sweep over the Cougars pushed the Tigers to 7-2 in league play and 10-4 overall.

"We're a little younger than last year with five sophomores who play quite a bit," Mitchell said as her team prepared for key league battles this week with Uwharrie Charter Academy and Providence Grove. "There is an age difference between seniors and sophomores. They were having to figure out how

to play together. It's a fun group to figure out what has to be done to put our best foot forward every game."

There have been some growing pains along the way. RHS started out 4-1 with three of those matches - two wins - going the full five sets. Then came PAC losses to SWR and UCA before a non-league loss to Oak Grove marked the Tigers' third straight setback.

"We worked as much as we could in the off-season with our hitters and setters to build that chemistry," Mitchell said. "Most of the girls came to our off-season workouts, but some had other commitments with jobs and other sports. The ones we had coming had a rapport, but then it was mixing in the ones who couldn't come as much."

Another challenge was switching schemes. Mitchell said



Senior Gabi Carter (#7) on the attack.

her talent pool has allowed her to play a 6-2 system, while in years past the Tigers ran a 5-1 offense. "We just haven't had the pieces to run it before," Mitchell said. "This year, with everyone's strengths and with the type of setters and hitters we have, this offense made sense for us. We had to figure out who worked better with what setters. The girls have done a great job of learning a lot about each other."



Tiger Senior Chloe Dixon.

After the three-game skid, the Tigers have turned things around, winning five straight conference games and a non-league game with Asheboro High School. RHS will take that six-game winning streak into action this week.

Mitchell said she is proud of her team's victory last week over SWR, a team it lost to in four sets the first time they played this season, but there is still plenty of work ahead.

"I hope it boosted their confidence going into the rest of conference and post season play," Mitchell said of the win. "We want to use this to our advantage, but we just can't settle for this. I hope they don't settle

for just this one win and think that's good enough. We still have a long way to go and there are a lot of things that we want to get better at."

The Tigers have received contributions from many players, including Chloe Dixon, who Mitchell said is the heart and soul of the team. Gabi Carter, Haley Hinshaw, Mollie Hall, Kenzie Roach, Karli Kennington, Camden Scott and Camryn Vickery have all made major contributions as have others.

They will all need to continue those contributions if the Tigers are going to excel in the rugged PAC.

"This conference is a blessing and a curse," Mitchell said. "The good thing is you always have to keep moving forward. There is never an off night, so that's great for competition and gives you a challenge. The bad thing is you have to learn on the fly. You don't have time to sit there and feel sorry for yourself or have a lot of time to enjoy victories."

The Tigers have apparently learned that and should be ready for another tough week of PAC volleyball.



Senior setter Kenzie Roach.



Sophomore setter Camryn Vickery.