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ASHEBORO - Getting off to a quick start in basketball can go a long way in determining the outcome. The Southwestern Randolph High School girls varsity basketball team has recorded some pretty impressive starts early in this basketball season and those starts have led to six easy wins.

The undefeated Cougars have outscored their first six opponents 143-31 in the first quarter and have used that momentum to a 429-163 overall scoring advantage.



Head coach Seth Baxter. Photo by PJ Ward-Brown/PJ Ward-Brown Photography.

Things are about to get tougher as the Mid-Piedmont Conference season begins this week, but fourth-year head coach Seth Baxter, who is beginning his 17th year overall as a head coach in basketball, said he has been impressed with his team's early showing.

"We know on paper, we are better, but that doesn't always translate to the court," Baxter said. "When you are facing a team you are better than, you don't want teams hanging around. When you get off to a great start, it gives your team confidence and you look for that killer instinct to put teams away. When you let teams hang around, you never know what will happen."

The Cougars haven't let any team hang around so far this season. SWR grabbed a 30-6 lead after one quarter in a season-opening 72-26 victory over Trinity, led South Stanly 25-3 after the first eight minutes in a 68-16 win, took a 25-6 first-quarter lead over Union Pines in winning 69-32, grabbed a 20-2 lead over South Davidson during a 70-22 wholopping, led Eastern Randolph 22-11 on their way to a 90-52 win and last Friday night led Trinity 21-3 after the first quarter in gaining a 60-16 win.

"I knew the Union Pines game was going to be a really big test and we passed that with flying colors," Baxter said. "I still don't know what we are really capable of because our starters are playing like 18 minutes a game so far. All 12 of our girls have played in every game. Every kid has got to play and we have seen a lot of combinations."

With the MPC season starting, Baxter said he and his team know things are about to get a lot more difficult. All seven teams from the MPC qualified for the state playoffs last year with Asheboro High School advancing to the fourth round and Southeast Guilford winning the state championship. Many of the other teams return a wealth of talent from successful seasons as well.

"We know the competition level is going to step up," Baxter said. "Our league is dynamite. The girls know that. We haven't faced much adversity yet and kids react to adversity differently. We're in the honeymoon stage because things have been hitting on all cylinders."

The Cougars, who advanced to the second round of the state playoffs last year in finishing 20-7, are led by a veteran group of players, including Heaven Maness, Sarah Crews, Jordan Claborn and Ashton Maness. Brooke Springer and sophomore Alexis Maness, the sister of Heaven Maness, are also playing key roles.

"Heaven is a special player," Baxter said of his senior guard, who set a school scoring record with a 44-point performance against Eastern Randolph last week. "She is one of the top five players who has ever played here. She can score, but what makes her so special is she leads the team in assists and she can rebound. She works hard in practice and hard in games."

Overall, the girls have been showing all the signs of what it takes to be successful.

"We are bigger size-wise since I have been here," Baxter said. "Our physical conditioning, we are in better shape than we were the first three years I have been here. We have focused on us and what we need to do to be successful. We have a good mix of veterans and young players and that mixture has been good for team chemistry. They get along well. You can have a lot of talent, but if you don't get along and the chemistry is not there, you are going to struggle. These girls have worked hard and they don't care who gets the credit, they just want to win."

Win is all they have done.



Southwestern Randolph senior guard Heaven Maness.