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ASHEBORO - Both Asheboro High School boys varsity basketball coach Brian Nance and Southwestern Randolph High School girls varsity basketball coach Seth Baxter realize the importance of winning a holiday tournament and the positive effects that it can have on a team.

Both have used holiday tournament victories to propel their teams to successful second halves of the regular season and then the postseason in the past and both are hoping that happens once again after capturing championships in the inaugural SportsTone.net Christmas Invitational held last week at Asheboro High School.

"There have been times when things weren't going well for us and this thing has kind of sprung us for the rest of the season," Nance said. "We weren't doing well and we won two games or the whole thing and it gives you confidence moving forward. It shows these kids that if they keep playing hard and working hard, they can have success.."

The Blue Comets had plenty of success on both sides of the floor last week with three easy wins. AHS started with a 72-40 win over Providence Grove, topped Southwestern Randolph 69-30 in the semifinals and then rolled to a 63-41 win over Randleman in the title game.



Tournament Champions: Asheboro Blue Comets.



Tournament runner-ups: Randleman Tigers.

"I've been doing this now 27 years and it's always been important, ever since I won the first one with the Randleman girls," Nance said. "We've always talked here about playing your non conference schedule, then winning a three mini-conference season and going on to conference. This is big for our confidence as we move on."

Jerquarius Stanback continued his incredible season by being named the most valuable player of the tournament. The long, athletic Stanback finished with 19 points against PG, 32 points against SWR and 23 in

the title game for a total of 74 points. He now has 988 for his AHS career and needs just 12 more to reach the 1,000-point plateau. The Blue Comets host Eastern Randolph Wednesday night. The two teams have not played one another since before Covid.

AHS' Cameron Walker and Elijah Woodle were also named to the all-tournament team as was Randleman's Tyshaun Goldston and Chase Farlow. AHS' Amare Godwin won the sportsmanship award.

The SWR girls may have turned to a different strategy in winning the title, but capturing the championship meant a great deal to Baxter and his Cougars.



Tournament Champions: Southwestern Randolph Cougars.

"We take a lot of pride in winning it," Baxter said. "I've been a player and a coach in this for 20 years (the former The Courier-Tribune Christmas Invitational) and I told the girls someone is going to be the first-ever Sportstone Christmas Invitational champion, only one. Why not us?"

It was. And perhaps even more impressive was the way the Cougars won the tournament.

SWR entered the three-day event with an 8-1 record while winning those eight games by an average of nearly 30 points. No team had held the Cougars to under 50 points in one game. But after a 66-25 win over NC Leadership Academy in the opening round of the holiday tournament, the Cougars had to rely on a stout defense the next

two games. The Cougars' shots were not falling, but their defense led them to a 42-31 win over Providence Grove in the semifinals and 45-30 over West Brunswick in the championship game. SWR held WB to just 10 points in the second half of the title game to break away from a 20-20 halftime tie.

"The best thing for me is that we had outscored so many teams coming in, these last two games we had to make it ugly, physical. We had to find another way to win. We showed that we can win both ways. We can win a slugfest or in an offensive showdown."

Jordin George was named the tournament's most valuable player after excelling on both ends of the floor. George and Maddie Strider led the second-half rally in the title game as Strider hit all six of her free throws in finishing 11 of 11 in the game.

Baxter pointed to the effort of inside players Kenzie Martin, Macy Allred and Gracie Hodgins as key. The three combined for 13 points and dominated the defensive boards.

Strider and Caressa King were also named all-tournament.



Tournament runner-ups: West Brunswick Trojans.

The Sportstone.net Christmas Invitational All-Tournament Team

GIRLS

Mya Hooker (Trinity)

Emmy Guldberg (NC Leadership Academy)

Sion Murrain (Asheboro)

Audra Petty (Randleman)

J.T. Tatum (E. Guilford)

Jada Nixon (Providence Grove)

Jahyra Mastry (W. Brunswick)

Hailey Woodard (W. Brunswick)

Maddie Strider (SW Randolph)

Caressa King (SW Randolph)

Most Valuable Player

Jordin George (SW Randolph)

Sportsmanship Award

Saniya Stanley (W. Brunswick)



The Sportstone.net Christmas Invitational All-Tournament Team

BOYS

Will Martin (NC Leadership Academy)

Tim Sanders (E. Guilford)

Brady Collins (Providence Grove)

Dominic Payne (Trinity)

Josiah Johnson (W. Brunswick)

Nathan Ellis (SW Randolph)

Chase Farlow (Randleman)

Tyshaun Goldston (Randleman)

Camden Walker (Asheboro)

Elijah Woodle (Asheboro)

Most Valuable Player

Jerquarious Stanback (Asheboro)

Sportsmanship Award

Amare Godwin (Asheboro)

