



SPECIAL FEATURE

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ASHEBORO - There are those who truly believe that to be successful at anything, one has to have fun doing it. Asheboro High School senior basketball player Jewell Barrett-Riggins is having a ball in his final season and it's showing on the floor.

The powerful inside player for the Blue Comets, who is averaging around 14 points and 10.8 rebounds a game, is a big reason the team is off to a 3-0 start in the extremely-tough Triad Area Athletic Conference, own a 13-4 record overall and will take a six-game winning streak into Friday night's league game at Northeast Guilford.

"I love my guys, my teammates," Barrett-Riggins said a few moments after he scored 12 points and had a similar number of rebounds as the Blue

Comets posted a 59-42 win over Eastern Guilford last Friday night. "This is one of the funnest teams I have ever been on."

But it wasn't always like that. Barrett-Riggins said he lost his love for basketball after moving to Asheboro from Tennessee in the third grade. As a youngster in Tennessee, Barrett-Riggins said he participated in numerous football and basketball camps and hung around older kids who played sports and that allowed him the advantage of learning techniques at a young age. After moving to Asheboro, for some reason his love for basketball and sports in general stopped as he spent most of his free time at home instead of an athletic field or in the gym.

He did not play basketball in 7th grade and after being injured late in his 8th grade football season, didn't play basketball in 8th grade either. It was then that Asheboro High School personnel began talking with Barrett-Riggins in an attempt to rekindle that spark for basketball.

With the prodding of varsity basketball coach Brian Nance and Barrett-Riggins' father, who took him to the Randolph-Asheboro YMCA to play basketball and work out, that spark began to show once again.



Jewell Barrett-Riggins. Photo by Eric Abernethy/The Randolph Hub.



Illustration 1: Asheboro senior Jewell Barrett-Riggins.

"Dad and I would go to the YMCA and try to figure things out," Barrett-Riggins said. "We needed to find that passion I had lost a while ago. And I actually picked some things back up. I hit the weights more and me and my dad would train sometimes. I regained my passion from playing at the YMCA. I would go down there and hoop with some friends and thought maybe I want to try this again."

Barrett-Riggins decided to play jayvee basketball as a freshman. But for whatever reason, Nance said that year didn't go as planned.

"I played with (Coach Robbie Coble) and didn't have much experience so it was a rough year for me," Barrett-Riggins said.

That spark began fading again. In fact, Nance said Barrett-Riggins wasn't even going to play basketball his sophomore year until head jayvee basketball coach Wes Luther became a steady presence in his life.

"We had to find the fun in a way," Luther said of what he emphasized to Barrett-Riggins time and time again. 'He started to enjoy it. He started to find success and when you find success, you start having a little more fun. Down the stretch that jayvee year (10th grade), he was averaging a double-double. He was the best player on the court every night for jayvees. He even had a dunk on the very last play that year. He's going to give you everything he's got. He's come a long way from that (9th-grade) year. There's a lot of things and a lot of hands and a lot of people that went into him and made him what he is now."

Barrett-Riggins said Luther did help him find that spark again.

"Wes is a very good coach, I learned a lot from him and that's when I started picking things up my sophomore year," Barrett-Riggins said.

Barrett-Riggins played jayvee as a sophomore, but often practiced with the varsity, which included Jerquarius Stanback, Osiris Rodriguez, Elijah Woodle and Cam Walker. Barrett-Riggins said it was another awakening.

"The first time I practiced with Nance (his sophomore year), it was tough," Barrett-Riggins said. "Playing inside with JQ and all those big boys. They didn't make it easy for me, they didn't give me anything. They were really tough inside. They weren't going to feel sorry for you. You had to play through the whistle."

Barrett-Riggins began contributing to the varsity team as a junior. His role and importance have increased in this his senior campaign.

"He's developed, become a lot less clumsy," Nance said of Barrett-Riggins. "When he first got here, he had a growth spurt and he was all over the place. He's turned himself into a really good athlete and that athleticism has transferred over to his play. He hasn't missed anything the last two summers and you're seeing the results of that now."

Barrett-Riggins said he's taken a little bit of a different mental approach for his senior season.

"This year, I'm more of a court general," he said. "Last year, I didn't use my voice as much. Now I am more open and letting people know what's going on on the court. I am playing for the team. Last year I probably didn't do that as much, but now I am really focused on being a team player."

Barrett-Riggins said something else is also fueling him this season.

"Everybody was expecting us to lose to those great teams because switching conferences, they think Asheboro can't hang with Guilford boys," Barrett-Riggins said, adding that team bonding and really listening in practice has helped put this team where they are. "We're trying to give them a message. We know what we're getting into now. We're not underestimating anyone, taking no one for granted. We're coming in with a clear head and coming to get it done. Everyone doubted us. Some people even on our side doubted us. We're not backing down."

And Barrett-Riggins is having fun while the Blue Comets are doing just that.