

January 21, 2020

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SportsTone.net

Six-hundred wins for any high school coach in any sport is a marvelous achievement. Randolph County had one coach reach that milestone this past weekend and another set to reach that number as early as tonight.

Uwharrie Charter Academy wrestling coach Chris Waddell reached the 600-win plateau this past weekend as the Eagles went 3-0 in capturing a tournament at Chapel Hill High School. The 600th win was an impressive 32-29 win over Chapel Hill High School before UCA rolled to an easy win over Vance for the title and Waddell's 601st career win.

Trinity High School basketball coach Tim Kelly, long considered one of the top boys basketball coaches in the state, captured win No. 599 Friday night in the Bulldogs' blowout win over High Point Andrews. Win 600 could come as early as tonight when Trinity makes the short trip to Ramseur to meet Randolph County and Piedmont Athletic Conference foe Eastern Randolph.



Coach Chris Waddell, Uwharrie Charter Academy.

Waddell has split his 601 coaching victories between Southwestern Randolph High School (472-65) and UCA, where he is 129-7 in his fourth season.

"It feels really good, I never imagined getting that many," Waddell said as he prepared his team for Wednesday's Yadkin Valley Conference match with South Stanly. "You don't think of that going in. But I really don't care about numbers. I just want our team to be good. That is what I have always strived for. If you have a solid team, you are going to do a good job as a coach. It's hard to fill out a team in any division."

After finishing the season undefeated last year in capturing the state dual meet championship and then the team title at the final state meet, the Eagles are an impressive 32-1 this season, defeating a number of 4-A teams throughout the state. The only loss came to 3-A Northern Guilford, which is one of the favorites to capture the state crown this season.

"We have talked a little about it between my assistant coaches and everyone has been so nice and congratulatory," Waddell said about his milestone coaching victory. "I'm more excited about what the kids are doing."

Waddell is certainly one of the reasons wrestling has grown in Randolph County.

"You are starting to see kids start to wrestle at a young age," Waddell said. "You are seeing kids now come to the middle school ready to compete."

Waddell said he has adapted his coaching style throughout the years.

"I was much tougher on them when I was younger," Waddell said with a slight chuckle. "My assistant coach, who was one of the first kids I coached, Eric Soto, tells our kids now they wouldn't have made it with me back then."

For Kelly, all of his wins have come at Trinity High School, where he is in his 31st season as head coach.

"I guess one of the biggest things being in one place for so many years is that when you are in one place for so long, it is tough to keep everyone focused and have them buy into what you are doing year after year," Kelly said. "We have had that and we're really proud of the consistency of success we have had over the years."

Kelly's teams are averaging about 19 wins per season.

"We sort have had a formula," Kelly said. "We saw a football coaching tape from Valdosta (Ga.) and we have tried to use that model. You start with boxes of below average, average, above average and elite and we identify who we have in what area and try and get them to the next block. You can't be successful without good players and we have had good players. That is because our kids have bought into what we are doing. Making ordinary plays all the time makes for an extraordinary player."

Kelly moved from the Eastern part of the state and landed a job at Trinity Middle School. Kelly said he had driven his wife to Trinity because his wife had just received a counseling position in the school district and it was then that Kelly was offered the middle school basketball position.



Coach Tim Kelly, Trinity High School.

Kelly, who said he applied for the position on three occasions, moved up to the varsity head coaching position for the 1989-90 season after four years in middle school.

It didn't take long for Kelly to turn the program around.

"Trinity had won 34 games in 17 years, an average of two a year," Kelly said. "When I took over, they had no paid assistants. There had been 13 coaches from 70-something until I took over. It was building a program. The program started doing well and then beginning in early 2000, we had a 12-year stretch that was pretty good. We won a state title and played for another. We played for some regional titles during that time. That kind of lighted the desire to be pretty good."

Kelly said he has been able to stay fresh all these years because of different challenges.

He was the varsity football coach for six years and turned that program around as well. The Bulldogs had lost 33 straight at one time before Kelly and his staff, which included Dennis Hamilton, Tim Setzer, Norman Weeks and Rick Halo among others, took over and led the program to some of its most successful teams in school history.

Like Waddell, Kelly said he has had to make some coaching adjustments throughout his long coaching tenure.

"I think they have changed a little because our society is kind of an instant gratification one," Kelly said of high school players. "It's getting harder for kids to see the light at the end of the tunnel. My ex-players will come back and say you are soft. It's not being soft, it's relating to the types of kids you have. It's not like it was in the old days where you tell kids to do it and they do it. Now you have to be more analytical. But really, for the most part, kids have bought into what we are doing. We are very proud of that."

Kelly says he will continue to coach as long as possible.

"I enjoy it and as long as I enjoy it, I will continue," said Kelly, now 62, said. "Overall, I have been blessed. We have had a few rough spots, but the community has rallied around us. As long as my health allows, I will coach."

Great news for the Bulldogs.