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ASHEBORO - Sean Adkins may not have known it at the time, but before moving from West Virginia and relocating to the Southwestern Randolph High School area for his sophomore season, he was already being counted on to pump life into the Cougars' varsity basketball program.

And he hasn't disappointed.

Adkins, now a senior, has helped SWR to one of its most successful league seasons in decades as the Piedmont Athletic Conference reaches the stretch run. SWR, which is 7-2 in league play, needs to win two of its final three conference games to finish with a league mark bested by very few Cougar teams in school history.

And it all started before Adkins ever took a step on the SWRHS campus.

"It's really an interesting story," said SWR varsity basketball coach Matt Kiser. "I love to tell the story."

It was the summer of 2020 and Kiser received a phone call from a past rival as Eastern Randolph High School graduate Bryan England, who was the head basketball coach at St. Albans High School in West Virginia, said he had a player moving into Randolph County. Sean's father, a former coach at Southern Guilford High School, was moving back into the area because of his job and the family was looking at different areas.

"He told me all about Sean and his family," Kiser said.

England was telling Adkins about Kiser as well.

"I loved Coach England and his system," said Adkins, who was on the jayvee team at St. Albans as a freshman, but who dressed for varsity games as well, seeing action in seven games for a team that finished 18-7 and was ranked in the top 20 in the state. "He told me he and Coach Kiser were similar in coaching styles and that he knew how to coach players. He said he was a good person with good morals and he knew how to coach."

Adkins said he took a lot he learned in that first year from England and his coaching staff to SWR.

"They really helped me develop the principles on how I play today," Adkins said.





*Southwestern Randolph senior Sean Adkins.
Photo provided.*

Adkins stepped into a very unfamiliar situation his sophomore year and instantly contributed. He earned a starting spot and was one of the team's leading scorers. He was living up to the accolades England gave him.

"Different players from different areas in the country are going to be different," Kiser said. "The competition may be better or it may be worse. You don't know. A kid may be a standout in some areas and not in others or vice versa. He came and he was a pleasant surprise. He's been a blessing for our team."

The Cougars finished 1-10 during his Covid sophomore season. Adkins said he wanted more.

"My sophomore year, I really didn't know anyone here and I just wanted to play and play as hard as I could and make an impact," Adkins said. "Going

into my junior year, we put a lot of time into preparing for that season."

Adkins averaged 15.8 points per game and led the team in assists as well as the Cougars improved to 12-13 overall.

"For one thing, he's tough," Kiser said of Adkins. "He plays tough. He's a competitor and he wants to win. I have coached what I consider to be some very good players who could do certain things. Score, rebound, handle the ball. Sean brings all of that."

This year, the Cougars didn't get off to the start they had hoped for as they began the season 0-3. SWR then won two straight before Adkins suffered a concussion in practice and had to miss a number of games. When he returned, the Cougars were in the midst of a five-game losing streak, but have since figured things out quite well.

Adkins is averaging 17 points and nearly 8 rebounds a game as the Cougars will take an 11-9 overall record into Tuesday night's home game against Eastern Randolph, which is undefeated in league play.

"After summer ball last year, I was shooting and working out every day," Adkins said. "Then I kind of took a step back and played football, but my teammates were still working hard every day. We knew this year we had a chance to do something special. We had good leaders and experience. It was going to take a team effort and we were



Sean Adkins. Photo provided.

going to have to play and work hard every day, but we knew this could be a really good team. We had to listen to what the coaches were telling us."

A victory over Wheatmore on Jan. 6 started the six-game winning streak, which included victories over Uwharrie Charter Academy, East Davidson, Trinity, Providence Grove and Randleman. After Tuesday night's game with the Wildcats, the Cougars close regular-season play with games against Wheatmore and UCA.

"Last year, we were in multiple close games," Adkins said. "I feel more confident that we know how to win close games. We trust each other and we are prepared for that. And our fans have been great supporters. We just need to stay humble and if we play the way we can, good things will happen. We just have to keep playing as a team and play hard and play together."

That recipe has led to quite an exciting season for Adkins and the Cougars.