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RANDLEMAN - Jake Smith chuckled a little when talking about his first two games as the head coach of the Randleman High School baseball team. The year was 2014 and Smith had been hired after he spent four years as an assistant coach at Wheatmore High School.

The Tigers were coming off years in which they went to the fourth round of the playoffs in 2010, won a state championship in 2011, advanced to the state finals in 2012 and again reached the fourth round of the state tournament in 2013.

In Smith's first two games of his head coaching career in that 2014 season, the Tigers dropped an 18-5 decision to Davie and suffered a 12-2 loss to Southeast Guilford, both run-rule setbacks.

"My dad joked that they were going to run me out of town," Smith said.

No one did and the Tigers are certainly glad they didn't.

Now in his 12th season at the helm of the Tigers, Smith has put together a coaching resume that very few can even come close to. Coaching in his 300th game in an RHS jersey on Tuesday, the Tigers recorded a 13-3 win over Asheboro in five innings, pushing Smith's record to 246-54, an .820 winning percentage.

His teams have won or tied for the regular season conference championship in 10 straight years - the 2020 season was cut short due to Covid - meaning entering this season, RHS has won 14 straight conference championships, the first three coming under the direction of Van Hurley and the fourth with Shawn Barker at the helm.

Perhaps even more impressive, the Tigers advanced to at least the fourth round of the state playoffs in 13 straight years. That string ended last year when RHS advanced to "only" the third round.

It's been an incredible run that began after the Tigers finished second in the conference and failed to make the playoffs in 2009.

"Credit everything to the players who have come while I have been here," said Smith. "I have seen the work they put in, and also to my assistant coaches. They are here day in and day out, not just during the season, but the off-season. The players, what they mean to me personally and to the program. These players and the players from the past I still stay in touch with. There has always been a special group of kids who come through and the credit obviously goes to them."





*Tigers baseball coach Jake Smith.*

Despite the losses in the first two games of the 2014 season, the Tigers quickly turned things around, winning the conference championship, advancing to the fourth round of the state playoffs and finishing with a 20-10 record. It was the most losses the Tigers would suffer in one season under Smith.

His 2015 team went to the state championship series, falling to South Granville in the third game of the best-of-three series.

The wins, the league titles and lengthy playoff appearances continued.

"We work through the middle school, go over expectations," said Smith, a graduate of Southern Guilford who went to East Carolina, winning the Johnny Bench Award as the nation's top catcher in 2006. "That is a big part of it. We stay involved with those guys. And it's about kids being committed. It's not a February through May or June thing.

It's an all-year thing and they are dedicated to it."

As time marched on, so did the number of wins for the RHS baseball program. The Tigers advanced to the 2019 state championship series, losing to North Lincoln in two games before the Covid year in which the Tigers were 3-0 before the season was cancelled.

In a shortened 2021 season, the Tigers finished 19-2, which included a state championship after defeating R-S Central in three games.

Then the Tigers had perhaps their most magical season. The Tigers won their first 16 games in 2022, outsourcing their opponents 185-14. During an Easter Tournament, the Tigers dropped their first and only game of the season to Catawba Ridge out of South Carolina, 8-3. Randleman went on to win its next 17 games, including playoff wins over Lincolnnton (15-0), East Gaston (11-0), Mount Pleasant (17-0) and East Surry (10-0) to reach the regional championship series. There, Smith led the Tigers to a sweep over the Community School of Davidson (12-0, 9-0) before sweeping Whiteville (12-0, 10-5) in the state championship series. RHS outscored its playoff foes 96-5 with seven straight shutouts.

"We've always been blessed with good pitching and good solid defense," Smith said. "Good pitching in high school wins a lot of games. Good defense takes care of maybe some offensive struggles you have. It's also about staying focused and playing our game. Everyone has to know their role. From the leadoff man to every guy on the bench, they all have roles."

The Tigers finished 33-1 that campaign.

A fourth-round playoff appearance in 2023 was followed by last year's third round exit. Still, RHS has won at least two state playoff games in 14 consecutive years.

With Smith accepting the school's athletic director position three years ago, the roles of the assistant coaches became even more important. Matt White and Barrett Davis have been with the program for years and Mark Leake has joined the staff.

"Our guys trust those guys," Smith said. "We're trying to be consistent in what we do and how we do it."

The administration and the community have also played vital roles in the baseball success over the years. Smith said the leadership from the top (Principal Corey Phillips) to his assistant principals along with the community have shown nothing but solid support over the years.

"They will be out whether we're 0-20 or 20-0, we know they will be there," Smith said of the large number in attendance at each and every game at Brookshire Field. "For me, that's important, but I know for the kids, it's exciting to play in front of all of them."

Smith has certainly helped put out a product that fans certainly want to see.