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TRINITY - Winning a state championship is an accomplishment that will never be forgotten by all those who experienced what is definitely the ultimate in high school sports. Players, coaches, managers, statisticians and fans will have cherished memories that will never be forgotten.

Of course, winning a state championship one season automatically means high expectations for the next season. The Wheatmore High School varsity girls soccer team, which captured the state 2-A championship last year with a perfect 25-0 record, certainly appears to be able to live up to those high expectations this season.



*Wheatmore senior Summer Bowman. Photo provided.*

The Warriors are a perfect 4-0 this year heading into tonight's Piedmont Athletic Conference battle with rival Trinity. In those four wins, Wheatmore has outscored their opponents 34-1, beating Ledford 6-0, surprising a very solid Ragsdale team 9-0, beating Southeast Guilford 10-1 and Lexington 9-0.

The 29-game winning streak for the team is the third longest in NCHSAA history, behind only the 32-game winning streak of W.A. Hough during the 2012 and 2013 seasons and the 48-straight wins Union Academy recorded from 2018-2021. With wins tonight against Trinity, Thursday night against East Davidson and Monday against Randleman, the Warriors would tie for the second longest winning streak in state history with a chance to move into sole possession of second with a win over Eastern Randolph on March 22.

"I called the friend you know I have and talked to him about how to approach the year after winning it all," WHS coach Rick Maness said of contacting UNC soccer coach Anson Dorrance, who has won 21 national titles in his illustrious career. "He said

you will have a bullseye on your back and your kids better be focused. So I am always trying to create ways to get the kids to buy into that."

Along with handing out pizza for every shutout to motivate the team, Maness said he talked specifically about the winning streak. First, he said, if the team won both its games last week, they would get Friday off from practice - which they did - and now he's challenging the team to grab the number of wins needed to move into second place on the all-time winning streak. He's using ways to motivate his team, but this team seems plenty motivated.

"You'd be surprised at all the things they do," Maness said. "We have a gentleman (the father of junior standout Ellie Garrison) who takes videos and those kids go back and watch them all the time. We had a player who didn't have a great game and she went back and watched the whole video. These kids are looking at Max Preps to see who they need to be looking out for. They are doing their homework. They want something special. They want another one. Is it doable? I don't know. But we have some freshmen who are stepping up."

Freshmen Meredith Partin and Kaitlyn Vazquez are making solid contributions.

The Warriors lost four key players from last year's state championship team, but returns a wealth of talent, especially in the scoring department. Junior Ellie Garrison set an NCHSAA scoring record last year with 77 goals, breaking the record of 76 held by Sarah Winslow of Wilson Fike in 2006. Senior Summer Bowman, who scored 36 goals last year, and sophomore Natalie Bowman, who scored 38 times as a freshman, give the Warriors a powerful offensive nucleus. Mikalah Walls, Maggie Messner and others are off to fast starts.

"We went out and got two volleyball players who haven't played before in Lucy Lockwood and Alby Pulaski and their work ethics have been great," Maness said. "They have fallen right in and are getting better every game."

Loaded with experience, talent and obviously with the motivation to achieve what this program experienced last year, the possibility is certainly there for back-to-back state titles.

"It's their team," Maness said. "I'm just along for the ride."



*Warriors senior Izabella Ringley. Photo provided.*