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RANDLEMAN - Most high school coaches realize the importance of senior leadership, players who have been in the program and understand through experience what it takes to be successful. But what happens when there are no seniors on the roster? Where does that "senior leadership" come from?

Well, for the Randleman High School softball team, the juniors and sophomores are stepping into those leadership roles and everyone seems to be doing just fine.

The Tigers, who do not have a senior on the roster, are 12-4 this year, including a 6-1 Piedmont Athletic Conference record.

"The sophomores and juniors have stepped up from a leadership perspective like your seniors normally do," RHS coach Jeff Webster said after the Tigers defeated Eastern Randolph 16-0 last Friday. "I am very happy where we are with this team, where we're at."

Webster, who is in his seventh year at the helm, said he knew years ago this special group of girls would have a great opportunity in front of them.

"I'm really not surprised at all," Webster said of the record. "The first season I started coaching middle school, these girls were sixth, seventh and eighth-graders and I sent a text message to Jake Smith, who is the AD now, Ryan Dobias and David Varner and I said these girls will be playing for a state championship within the next four years. You have to get a lucky break and have the ball bounce your way one time, but I had seen them and saw what they could do."

Natalie Roach, Kaylie St. John, Kadie Green, Makayla Striblin and Lyric Chriscoe are the juniors and a very strong sophomore group includes pitcher Kinzie Ivey, Addyson Dees, Teanna Bostic, Kaylee Phillips and Elsie Prince. The freshmen are Isabel Kirkpatrick, Olivia Ashby and Lilah Covington.

"I feel we are playing like we have nothing to lose," said Dees. "Every day we come out for each other and I feel our coaches are doing a great job of pushing us all to be leaders. We keep each other accountable. This sophomore class has played together for a long time, even outside of school ball. That's our family. We get to go out and play the game we love. It's amazing."



Randleman head coach Jeff Webster. Photos provided.



Tigers sophomore Addyson Dees.

Dees is hitting .395, Ivey .327 and Phillips .326. Chriscoe and Green are just under the .300 mark, while Ivey and Dees have been dynamite on the mound. Ivey is 7-2 with a 2.40 ERA and Dees is 5-2 with a 1.88 ERA.

"She's obviously gotten better over the year," Webster said of Ivey, who handled most of the pitching duties last year as a freshman. "Her control and location have improved, You can tell she put a lot of work in. Another thing that has helped her is our other pitcher Addyson Dees. Addyson coming in and being as strong as she is has taken some of the pressure off of Kinzie. She doesn't have to carry the load every day. The reverse of that is it puts a little bit of competition to her. She doesn't feel all the pressure of doing it every game, but she's being pushed."

Ivey said the pressure this year has been relieved.

"I felt a lot more pressure last year, I was the only pitcher," Ivey said, noting Green was injured and Dees was forced to play shortstop for most of the campaign. "All the pressure was on me. We didn't have any other option. Addie being there really helps. There's nowhere near the pressure."

The Tigers have outscored their foes, which has included softball powers West Stanly (a record of 15-1), Northern Guilford (14-4) and West Forsyth (10-0) by a 120-40 count. Three of the four losses have come to those powers with the fourth being a 3-2 setback to Southwestern Randolph (10-2) in PAC action back on March 18. The two will get together again this Friday at SWR.

Webster said a key has been hiring coaches and delegating specific areas for each coach. While Webster works with the infielders, Jason Scott works with the outfielders, John Ashby is in charge of the pitchers and catchers and John Kirkpatrick handles the hitting.

"That has made a huge difference in everything I can do," Webster said. "They are each in charge of their area. Having that specified attention and not having to hear all these different voices has helped."

RHS is one game behind 7-0 SWR in the PAC. With a game against Wheatmore on Tuesday followed by the crucial battle against the Cougars, this is a big week for the Tigers.

"The last couple of years, a lot of the girls may have had some nerves when they played Southwestern, but this group is not scared," Webster said. "They realize there is no gap between the teams."