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RANDLEMAN - The players say they don't talk about it. The coach says he never mentions it in any pregame speech or for any extra motivational purpose.

But they all know about it and it stayed alive thanks to a thrilling 5-4 win last Friday night over Central Davidson at Brookshire Field.

The Randleman High School varsity baseball team has one of the most impressive streaks in NCHSAA history as RHS has won or shared the conference championship for 16 straight seasons. But if not for the victory Friday night over the Spartans, that streak would have certainly ended this year.

A five-run third inning that featured a grand slam from Tate Andrews, lockdown pitching from John Kirkpatrick and Andrews, a defense that shined after an early collapse and a play most everyone is still asking "why?" were all pivotal in earning the possibility to extend the impressive streak to 17 straight seasons.



Randleman coach Jake Smith.

"We don't talk about it," RHS coach Jake Smith said after the Tigers improved to 7-1 in the Piedmont Athletic Conference and 15-4 overall. "We make it one of our goals every year, a conference championship. They know the expectations. I don't have to bring it up daily. It's part of the process and it takes care of itself."

Central Davidson came into Friday night's contest with the opportunity to basically lock up a conference championship, which would have ended the streak. The Spartans were 9-0, including a 2-1 win over Randleman in the first game of the series just three nights prior. A win over the Tigers Friday would have boosted CD to 10-0 with two league games remaining against High Point Andrews, which is 1-14 on the season in being outscored 179-33.

More than likely two easy wins there, which would have left the Spartans a perfect 12-0 in league action.

"They all know about it, we just don't talk about it," Smith said, even after the Tigers fell behind 3-0 in the top of the first inning. "I don't say, 'Guys, we have to win to keep this streak alive.' That's not how we approach it. We go out there and play the best we can every game."

Andrews, who hit a grand slam in the third inning to highlight the five-run frame, said the players are aware of the streak, but like Smith said no one talks about it.

"We're definitely aware of it, but we really don't talk about it, we just try and go out and win every game we can," Andrews said.

After an error played a huge role in allowing the Spartans to jump into that 3-0 first-inning lead, the Tigers battled back in the third. A walk, a flyout and three more consecutive walks forced in the first run of the inning and then Andrews blasted his no-doubt homer over the left-centerfield fence.

"It felt good," Andrews said of the contact with the baseball. "I have been struggling this year so far and I feel all my work is finally paying off. The baseball looked like a beach ball coming in today. I saw it really well out of his hand and got my swing on."

Central Davidson hurlers walked six Tigers in the inning. That outburst put the Tigers into a 5-3 lead and Kirkpatrick, who wiggled out of a couple of jams, stayed until leaving the mound after hitting the leadoff batter in the sixth.

"Playing hard the whole game, not getting down after the first inning, a couple of hiccups," Kirkpatrick said. "Just battling back and having confidence in our hitters and knowing if we pass it off to the next person, he'll get the job done."

CD scored a run in the sixth to make it 5-4 and then had a golden opportunity in the seventh when the leadoff hitter singled and stole second without a throw. With no one out, the runner broke for third and Andrews used an inside move before throwing the ball to third, where shortstop Jake Riddle tagged the runner after a brief rundown.

"It was an inside move and he took off," Andrews said. "I didn't throw it to second or panic. Just ran at him and gave it to my third baseman and he got in a pickle."

The next batter walked, but third baseman Ashton Poe grabbed a bouncer, flipped it to second for one and the relay throw was in time for a game-ending double play.

The Tigers still have league games with High Point Central and Ledford, which could pose a problem. Ledford is in third place in the PAC.

But because of grit and determination, the Tigers' goal of 17 consecutive years in which they have won or shared the league title is still alive.