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By Dennis Garcia
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ASHEBORO - When it comes to high school softball, one thing Randolph County is well known for is stellar pitching.

The county has been able to boast some of the top hurlers in the state in past decades and most notably in recent memory. From past hurlers such as Providence Grove's Anna Thomas, Eastern Randolph's Savannah Beaver and Randleman's Sarah Rice to current PG pitching sensation Emma Mazzarone, there is a long list of pitchers who have enjoyed incredible prep careers.

Another who has the talent to join that long, impressive list of dominating hurlers in the county is Southwestern Randolph freshman Macie Crutchfield. Yes, freshman.



Southwestern Randolph freshman Macie Crutchfield.

"As a coach, you are told you have this coming and that coming and this coming to you and after so long, it's like 'OK, yea'," SWR coach Chad Whitson said. "This one was legit and then some. I have known about her since she came to middle school and she had a reputation of being better than average back then. She has been a surprise. She is flat-out the first dominant pitcher I have ever had. She's a joy. Especially her competitive spirit."

Crutchfield is well on her way to being mentioned with Randolph County's elite. In her first year at the varsity level, she is 8-3 with a 1.01 ERA. She has pitched 75 $\frac{2}{3}$ innings, given up just 35 hits and hurled a perfect game and two one-hit shutouts.. Her 134 strikeouts is a number any pitcher would be proud of and she still has plenty of action remaining as the Cougars finish up their regular-season schedule before the PAC and state tournaments.

"She works so hard at what she does," Whitson said. "She just has a lot of competitive spirit."

Crutchfield points to a very tough travel ball career as a big asset in helping succeed at the high school level. She is currently playing with the Atlanta Vipers, a team that plays in an upper age bracket against some of the toughest competition in the country. She has already traveled to Colorado and Oklahoma for national tournaments and she is slated to head to California in July.

"I just like going to camps and playing hard competition," said Crutchfield, who said she started playing at age 4 and started pitching at age 9. "I just always stuck with it. When I first started pitching, I really liked it."

Having played with and against some of the top competition in travel ball has apparently prepared her very well for the varsity level. She has made the move from middle school to the high school level very successfully.

"It was a big difference, but at the same time it wasn't because of travel ball," said Crutchfield, who said she has pitched four games and played as many as eight in one weekend. "I have always played that level of competition."

Crutchfield's demeanor on the mound and her ability to spin the softball are both attributes rarely seen in a high school underclassman.

"The more you can spin the ball, the more you can make it move," Whitson said. "Curveball, riseball, drop ball. I have been told that's where all your velocity and movement comes from. She works hard and I think she's very stone-cold in the circle. She has great location. She's a joy to call pitches for because she hits spots very consistently."

Randolph County certainly has had an incredible number of talented hurlers in the past. Crutchfield is well on her way to being perhaps one of the most talented in that very special group.



Right-handed pitcher Macie Crutchfield in pre-game warm-ups.