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By Dennis Garcia  
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RANDLEMAN - Being patient can sometimes be difficult. But when you play for one of the most successful sports programs in the state of North Carolina, patience can certainly pay off.

Patience has paid off in a big way for RHS senior Austin Lemons who, in his senior year at RHS, has enjoyed an incredible season and has become one of the many reasons the Tigers have continued a very impressive stretch in conference play. Having just clinched their 14th straight league championship, the Tigers finished 12-2 in the Piedmont Athletic Conference and bring a 17-4 overall record into action in this final week of the regular season.

After two years on the jayvee team, Lemons first was called up to the varsity his sophomore year for the state playoffs and then joined the varsity full time last season, a season in which the Tigers finished 33-1 while claiming their second straight 2-A state championship. With a number of key players graduating from that team, it was up to Lemons and a good number of the other players to step up and provide the Tigers with talent and leadership.

It was their time.

"He got some spot innings here or there last year, but he had a lot of talent around him," RHS coach Jake Smith said. "Not that he wasn't talented. He gained a lot of experience watching those guys before games and after - how they took care of their bodies and their arm care. He has channeled that into his senior year and he's having the best year of his career."

While some would certainly be impatient or even upset about having to wait, Lemons took full advantage of his situation.

"It was definitely a grind knowing there are so many good people showing up to practice every day, but I was watching and learning from them for when I did get my chance this year," Lemons said. "The key takeaways were watching pitchers and how they threw and how they handled themselves in tough situations. It seemed like no one got rattled and they all had confidence in their abilities."

He learned those lessons, plus many more, quite well.



*Randleman senior Austin Lemons.  
Photo provided.*

Entering play this week, Lemons was 7-1 with a 1.40 ERA. He has hurled 48 ⅓ innings, given up just 35 hits, walked 17 and struck out 70. His only loss all season came to 4-A power Northwest Guilford.



*Austin Lemons. Photo provided.*

"He changed his mental approach and had a really good summer," Smith said of Lemons, who played with the Dirtbags travel ball organization. "He changed some things mechanically, his release point, and changed his mental approach. Mentally, he didn't let things happen so fast and it was: don't try and be someone else, and control what you can control. It's really special seeing him succeed because I know how hard he works. There is a lot of time and energy put into it and the mentality he takes the field with is special to watch."

Being a part of an incredibly successful program is really special. Contributing at the level Lemons has contributed this year is awe-inspiring.

"It's definitely a surreal moment," he said of wearing the RHS uniform. "I came here when I was in elementary school dreaming I would be here someday. All of my

teammates make it fun and enjoyable."

Lemons, who is heading to UNCG in the fall to play baseball, is a strong offensive player as well, hitting near the .300 mark for the Tigers.

"He's swinging it pretty well for us right now," Smith said.

Patience can indeed be hard. But if used the right way and for a purpose, patience can lead to extraordinary things. Like the season Lemons is having for the Tigers.