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ASHEBORO - The Southwestern Randolph High School softball team used the Piedmont Athletic Conference Tournament last year to regroup and went on to not only win the PAC Tournament but capture the 2-A state championship.

The Cougars, who did not win the regular season title last year, lost three straight games entering the PAC tournament before turning things around to win 11 of 12 postseason encounters.

With the PAC electing not to have an end-of-season tournament this year, the Cougars must have decided to grab that momentum when they could. And grab that momentum they certainly have done.

SWR clinched the PAC regular-season title last week with league wins over Eastern Randolph (14-0), Randleman (5-0) and Wheatmore (6-0). Without a league tournament after Thursday's final regular season game against Uwharrie Charter Academy, the Cougars are using an incredible run at the end of the season to gain momentum for the upcoming state playoffs.



*Cougar senior Savannah Holleman.*



*Junior Maddie Strider.*

"I'm really disappointed we are not having a conference tournament this year," said second-year head coach Toby Strider. "That's one thing I started talking to the girls about when we got back from spring break. The thing I like about the tournament is the mental preparedness it gives you for a state playoff run. If you lose, you're done. The conference kind of gives you a scrimmage in that mindset. If you lose, you're done."

"Here's what I told the girls," continued Strider. "We're going to play all four games (the final four of the regular season) like they are all state playoff games and if we lose, we're done. That's the mindset we have to have."

The Cougars are far from done as they have been about as dominant as a team can be. And it stretches back to way further than just the past three games. In taking a nine-game winning streak into the final game against UCA, the Cougars had recorded six shutouts, allowed just one run twice and two runs once. They hadn't won a game by less than three runs and have outscored their foes 74-4 in that span.

Oh, but it gets even more impressive. After surrendering 15 runs in a season-opening 15-4 loss to North Stanly in a game Strider said he used as a scrimmage, SWR has a 115-12 run differential. SWR pitching has allowed one run or less 13 times with nine of those being shutouts.



*Junior Ryleigh Hine line.*



*Senior pitcher Macie Crutchfield.*

Senior Macie Crutchfield has been the catalyst. She recently passed 700 strikeouts in her career and has been a mainstay in the circle all four years.

"Can't say enough about Macie, she's just great at her craft," Strider said. "She's stubborn as a mule. Stubborn is a good quality. Anything in life that makes you bad makes you good."

Crutchfield, who will be playing at Catawba, said she believes the team is peaking.

"I feel we're pretty much on it and we're hitting really good, and we're making big plays and routine outs heading into the playoffs," Crutchfield said. .

Alyssa Harris has been a key member on the mound as well. In Thursday night's 6-0 win over Wheatmore, she fanned all four batters she faced to combine with Crutchfield on a no-hitter. Crutchfield walked one batter in the fifth before departing. She fanned 15 to give the pitching duo 19 in the contest. SWR, which carries a 15-2 overall record into Thursday's game, will be looking to finish unbeaten in the PAC Thursday. Strider said a lot of the team's success is credited to the community.



*Junior shortstop and pitcher Alyssa Harris.*

"We've had such good community support and such good crowds," Strider said. "I showed them before we played Randleman the other day that I watched people pull in the school from 11 until 2 to put up their chairs and save their seats. That's how much this program means to this community."

This group of girls has certainly given the community something to be very proud of.



*Sophomore Nauttica Parrish bringing it home.*