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RANDLEMAN - The high school playoffs can certainly raise the blood pressure level for participating players, coaches and their fans. What the Randleman High School softball team has accomplished is not only remarkable, but how they are going about it makes it even more exciting.

The Tigers, a team without any seniors on the roster, have won four rounds in the playoffs in nail-biting fashion, earning a berth into the West Regional Championship Series for the first time in school history. RHS did advance to the single-game regional final in 2003.

Coach Jeff Webster has said all season long he knew this group of girls, which has shown an extreme talent level since middle school, would one day be in position to capture a state championship. But is this earlier than expected?

"You know, I am going to say maybe," Webster said the morning after the 15th-seeded Tigers recorded a 3-1 road win over third-seeded West Stokes to reach the regional finals. "That's what may be the best answer. Every team has a goal to win a state championship and go as

far as they can in the playoffs. My goal this year was to see if we could make it to the third round with this group and give them a taste of what this is all about. I've known how good these girls are for years. It's definitely been exciting."

The Tigers, who placed second in the Piedmont Athletic Conference during the regular season, received the 15th seed to start the state 2-A tournament. The first round resulted in a 4-2 win over R-S Central, the only home game the team had.

The Tigers then went on the road and earned a 3-2 win over second-seeded West Caldwell, a 4-3 win over seventh-seeded Owen and Friday night's 3-1 win over third-seeded West Stokes.

Sophomore hurler Kinzie Ivey has been a huge part of the team's success as she has pitched all but two innings in the



Head Coach Jeff Webster.



Tiger pitcher Kinzie Ivey.

playoffs, having to come out during the Owen game because of a slight back injury.

"I know for me, I have been trying to be emotionally strong and if they do hit the ball, it's okay," Ivey said. "I am not trying to be perfect. I'm trying to hit my spots and if they hit the ball, my defense will have me. I know everyone on our team cares and everyone is going to put their heart into it when they are playing. I just want to make sure I'm getting the job done. With every batter who comes up, I am just trying to get the job done."

With Ivey on the mound, a stout defense behind her and some clutch hitting, the Tigers have found themselves on the positive side of some nerve wracking situations.

With two outs in the sixth inning against West Caldwell, four consecutive doubles accounted for the RHS runs. Kaylee Phillips, Kaylie St John, Teanna Bostick and Lilah Covington had those hits and Ivey fanned six for the win.

The Tigers led Owen 4-0 before seeing the home team rally for three runs to make things very interesting. RHS held on, then had a slim 2-1 lead over West Stokes Friday night before tacking on a key insurance run in the seventh for a victory.

"Inside, for me, it's probably not good for my health, but outwardly, I try to keep my composure so they keep their composure," Webster said. "It's something I tell them every game. We are playing for 21 outs. There are 21 outs and if we're ahead, we're playing for those 21 outs. If we're behind, we're playing until those 21 outs are done."

It's a philosophy that has worked quite well for the Tigers, a sophomore-laden team who is receiving plenty of contributions from everyone on the roster.

Two freshmen who have been big contributors not only during the regular season but in the Tigers' playoff run are Covington and Olivia Ashby. Ashby, who is in the ninth position in the batting order, has recorded seven hits in the four playoff games.

"It feels amazing, especially as a freshman, to have the opportunity to play in the regionals," said Ashby, the Tigers' right-fielder. "We have such a good bond. I just have the mentality to try my best, try not to put too much pressure on myself. I'm glad I got the opportunity to show what I can do. I just go out and try to do the best I can."



Outfielder Olivia Ashby.

The Tigers begin regional play Tuesday night at top-seeded West Wilkes (23-3). The rest of the schedule will be finalized in the beginning of the week.

"I know Coach Webster has been saying since middle school we are going to have a chance to win a state championship someday," Ivey said. "I don't think it's too early. I think it's time."