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RANDLEMAN - Breaking a high school sports record is a special achievement, one that takes hard work, dedication, practice, and excelling in that sport. To be called the greatest a high school has ever had in its history is an honor that very few student-athletes can claim.

Randleman High School soccer standout Owen Leonard has earned that honor.

Leonard became RHS' all-time leader in goals scored the same game he broke the single-season scoring mark, tallying four times in a 7-1 win over High Point Andrews Tuesday night at Charles R. Gregory Stadium. His career total of 80 goals breaks the mark of 77 set by Francisco Cortez, a 2013 graduate, and his four goals brought his season total to 30, breaking the previous mark of 29 set by Jake Bishop in the 2010 season.

"I am incredibly proud," RHS coach Sean Fitzgibbon said after watching Leonard reach both milestones. "We have worked so hard to build this program up and to see one of these players have the success that Owen has had the last couple of years, and to see how his teammates are behind him 100 percent to push him and earn these achievements is a very proud moment."



*Randleman senior Owen Leonard. Photo provided.*

For Leonard, who spent time in Italy to further his soccer talent, his final season has produced 30 goals and seven assists for 67 points. This follows a freshman campaign where he scored seven goals - while playing on the team with older brother Andrew - a sophomore season in which he scored 21 goals with 19 assists and a junior year that totaled 22 goals with 13 assists.

"Exciting," Leonard said about breaking the records. "I have been waiting for this for a while. I've been trying and trying to get this mark. It feels amazing. The hard work is paying off."

Leonard was never told how many goals he needed to break the records until less than a week ago when word leaked out.

Leonard's mother was trying to keep those numbers a secret so Leonard wouldn't feel any added pressure to score. But in this

age of closely-watched statistics and social media, those numbers became known and Leonard didn't waste any time in setting those records. The team celebrated each feat with party poppers, which sprayed confetti into the air and on Leonard.

"He's the most prolific goal scorer I have ever seen in my life," said Fitzgibbon, a 20-year coaching veteran. "He understands how to break down defenders, how to go to the goal and how to finish. His speed of play is like playing chess against a grand master. He is three passes ahead of most players on the field. He puts himself in position to get passes, makes runs most defenders don't recognize until it's too late. He is very technical. I don't see him take bad touches."

Against the Red Raiders Tuesday, he scored on a penalty kick early in the game, which tied the career scoring mark, then broke it on a shot from the right of the goalie.

"It was routine, it is what we do in practice," he said.

He tapped in his third goal of the first half from right in front, then added the single-season record tally on a hard shot from a tight angle in the second half.

"It's just consistency," said Leonard, who for years has also been a part of the Asheboro City Futbol Club, formerly known as the Central Carolina Soccer Club, as well as the Premier UK, a soccer club for advanced players. "I do the same drills over and over. It's repetition. It's doing my job on the field when my team needs me."

Fitzgibbon said he knew he had a special class when this group was in middle school. The Tigers have certainly had plenty of success in the past three seasons. After RHS finished 7-12-1 in Leonard's freshman campaign, they have put together seasons of 18-7 and 15-8-2 before this year, which has seen the Tigers record an impressive mark of 13-4-3, including a 7-1 record in the Piedmont Athletic Conference.

"That group of freshmen who came in that year, I knew when they were in seventh grade they were going to be something special," Fitzgibbon said. "A group of five who have been the core of our team for six years. With Owen being the only player in the group who was an attacking player, the other four are on defense, Owen had an opportunity to really stand out as a goal scorer. It means a lot as a coach to see players all the way from the sixth grade become seniors and watch them grow up and turn into outstanding young men is awesome."

Fitzgibbon has always used a philosophy that may have prevented Leonard from scoring even more. But the player and coach have always agreed on the reason for executing that philosophy.

"I am not going to let one player run rampant and score seven or eight goals against a weaker opponent," Fitzgibbon said. "Three goals when we have a big lead and my younger players, who don't have a lot of experience, are going to play. The other way doesn't make us any better as a team. There are a lot of good goal scorers who are scoring seven or eight goals against weaker competition. Owen understands he's there to help make our players better. To teach young kids how to score goals. He puts himself out there to help others. That's what makes him such a great leader."



*Owen Leonard. Photo provided.*

Leonard has scored four goals in one game just twice, once against Wheatmore and Tuesday night when he broke both scoring records.

During the past two games after Leonard learned how many goals he needed to score to set both records, he continued his philosophy on the pitch.

"It's pretty difficult, but during the game I try to get everything out of my mind and think like a little goldfish and go," said Leonard, who started playing soccer when he was four years old. "Gold fish have the shortest memories."

The Tigers have a key league match Monday at home against first-place Montgomery Central.

"My teammates mean the word to me," Leonard said. "They have been with me in the ups and downs. Especially Ronaldo Murillo and Mitchell Carranza. They have been with me all four years and have experienced the ups and downs."

Leonard and this very special group have four more regular-season games remaining before the 4-A state tournament. The Tigers still have remaining league games with Montgomery Central, Central Davidson, High Point Central and Ledford.

As if that wouldn't keep Leonard busy enough, he's also a member of the varsity football team, handling the kicking duties. He has connected on all 19 PATs and is a perfect 3-for-3 in the field goal department.

"Any day we do not have a game, Owen will go and kick for the football team and run special teams for 45 minutes and then meet us at Randleman Park, where we practice," Fitzgibbon said.

It's still a few weeks away, but Leonard has already set his plans for the soccer playoffs. RHS was 18th in the 4-A RPI rankings entering this week's action.

"We want to get beyond the second round," Leonard said. "Beyond the second round."

With Leonard leading the group, that certainly appears to be possible.