



Providence Grove softball players, from left, Edie Austin, Emma Mazzarone and Makayla McClain have led the Patriots to an undefeated 2022 season. PHOTOS BY MONICA HOLLAND/THE COURIER-TRIBUNE

Winning with swag and sass

Undefeated Providence Grove carries confidence into third round

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FRANKLINVILLE — Providence Grove softball enters the third round of state 2A playoffs with a 23-0 record and an average margin of victory of 7.6 runs.

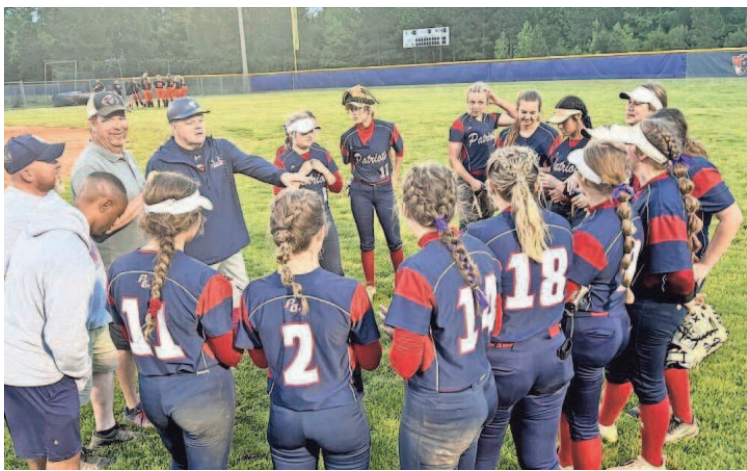
In their 23 wins, the Patriots have 13 shutouts and have given up more than one run just four times.

Junior ace Emma Mazzarone, who's committed to Virginia Tech — the No. 1 team in the ACC ranked No. 2 nationally — has the second-lowest ERA across all classifications in the state at 0.29, according to MaxPreps.com. She hit 69 mph in Thursday's 4-1 second-round win over West Wilkes while striking out 17 batters.

The Patriots' talent makes them one of the toughest teams in North Carolina, but Mazzarone sees a little something extra that takes them to another level.

"We're all kind of fiery," she said after Thursday's win. "We've all got a little bit of sass to us and we refuse to lose."

Whether it's the confidence that comes from a dominant season or the swag born of long batting practices and day-in, day-out hustle at practice, these Patriots are at the top of their game



Coach Tim Brown talks to his Providence Grove softball players after a 4-1 win against West Wilkes in the state 2A playoffs on Thursday.

mentally and physically.

"This is a resilient group," coach Tim Brown said Thursday after Providence Grove rallied from an early 1-0 deficit with three runs in the fifth inning as a steady rain fell.

His team has only trailed three times this season, fighting off the challenge of

a strong Southwestern Randolph squad in the Piedmont Athletic Conference.

Thursday's win, which matches the Patriots' deepest playoff run into the third round, was sparked by the low

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end of the batting order.

“Tonight, the bottom picked us up. We scored and tied and went ahead and didn’t get the ball out of the infield,” Brown said.

Reann Saunders drew a fifth-inning, one-out walk from West Wilkes pitcher Haley McManus, a junior who’s also committed to Virginia Tech. She scored on a Morgan Gruer bunt that was thrown away.

Gruer scored on Devon Kelly’s grounder to third, and then Austin got a hit and Mazzarone sent her home when she beat out a grounder to short.

“We scored and tied and went ahead and didn’t get the ball out of the infield,” Brown said, noting his team’s will-to-win mentality.

“All of our lineup can hit,” McClain, who’s committed to Campbell, said. “We’ll get it done, no matter what.”

Mazzarone agreed. “We clean up a little bit and get some plays going and we’ll go a long way, ‘cause we’re there in the lineup,” she said. “We always end up pulling it out somehow.”

How have the Patriots managed to win every game? Austin’s answer was simple: swag. “We know we can win,” she said. “We put in work every day.”

Brown, who started coaching at Providence Grove in 2010, hit the 100-win plateau with the Patriots in their first game of the season.

His teams have gotten to the third round of NCHSAA playoffs in 2018, ‘19 and ‘20. When the Patriots take on No. 8 seed Mount Pleasant (16-8) tonight, they’ll have the opportunity to do what no other Providence Grove softball team has done by reaching the fourth round and regional semifinals.

Brown believes he’s got the talent to make it happen.

“Listen, I’ve got the best three hitters in the state right here,” he said, nodding toward Austin, Mazzarone and McClain.

“They lead by example and they keep everybody in check.”

While the Patriots exude confidence and carry that belief into every game, they also have the humility to keep pushing for more.

“I try to work hard at what I do,” McClain said. “You can always get better.”

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