



August 1, 2023

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SportsTone.net

ASHEBORO - In years past, Randolph County Post 45 has entered the American Legion Southeast Regional Tournament after winning the North Carolina State Tournament as well as entering the SER after failing to qualify for the state championship.

While winning a state title is certainly an incredible achievement, Post 45 has captured the regional championship entering both as a state champion and without a state title. It will try to accomplish that feat this week without a state title as the 2023 Southeast Regional begins Wednesday at McCrary Park.



State champions from North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia, Tennessee, Kentucky, Georgia and Florida along with the host team Post 45 will be vying for a trip to the American Legion World Series in Shelby. It's a trip Post 45 took in 2017, 2018 and 2019 with the 2017 team being the last team to win a state championship.

"We've won it (the regional championship) both ways," said veteran coach Ronnie Pugh, whose team is scheduled to open play Wednesday night against Tennessee at 7:30 p.m. "I think you just go out and play. You can't worry about what happened the last two or three weeks."

Post 45 was eliminated by Rowan County in five games in the Area III semifinals, with the deciding Game 5 played on July 17.

"I've seen when it's good when you have a layoff and sometimes you don't want to have a break because of the way you have been playing," Pugh said. "This year, I don't think it can do anything but help us. We had some issues with college guys and summer school and we passed around strep throat. We had two pretty significant injuries that have had time now. As a coach, you always wonder if layoffs hurt or help you, but you still have to go out and play the game. All the other teams are coming in off winning tournaments."

A late start because of the high school baseball playoffs and then an injury has limited Pierce Leonard to 17 games and Braylen Hayes has dealt with a shoulder issue. Both are expected to be ready for the Regional.

Post 45 had a solid summer, splitting eight games with Rowan County and losing twice to High Point, which won the Area III Northern Division. They beat every other team on their schedule, including games with Cleveland County, Morgantown, WV., St. Marys (Maryland) and Fuquay-Varina.

# AMERICAN POST 45 LEGION

B A S E B A L L

STATE  
CHAMPIONS

2017  
2008  
1978  
1966



REGIONAL  
CHAMPIONS

2019  
2018  
2017

"It all comes down to pitching it, hitting it, catching it and throwing it," Pugh said. "All the teams coming in are good teams. We're just going to go out and compete. A lot of people don't like to compete any more. You get a group who likes to compete and you go play."

Tanner Marsh has led the offense all summer as he will bring a .418 batting average into the SER.

He has a team-high eight home runs, 11 doubles, 39 runs and 34 RBIs. Tyler Parks, who has played just 17 games because of his commitment to UNC, is hitting .407 and Hayes is hitting .368. Hunter Atkins is hitting .398 with 32 runs scored. Leonard was hitting .388 before being injured. The team is hitting .305 and averaging 7.3 runs per contest.

On the mound, Robert Garner is a perfect 4-0 with a 1.89 ERA. Drew Harmon is 3-0 with a 1.44 ERA, Samuel Asbill is 5-1, and Marsh has recorded four saves with a 2.03 ERA. No one has scored on him in the past 9  $\frac{2}{3}$  innings.

The opening game against Tennessee will be key.

"It's obviously a confidence builder (if you win)," Pugh said. "It kind of depends on how you win. You could lose a lot of pitching that first night and it can come back and get you later in the tournament. You win that first game, though and it puts you in the afternoon and night games."

On Wednesday, Georgia will play Kentucky at 9:30 a.m., Florida will battle Virginia at 12:30 p.m., South Carolina and North Carolina meet at 4:30 p.m. and Post 45 will play Tennessee at 7:30 p.m.

Action continues through Sunday with as many as 15 games scheduled.