

May 10, 2022

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SportsTone.net

RANDLEMAN - While growing up, Randleman High School senior Brooks Brannon may have heard more than just a few times how his father, Paul Brannon, set the North Carolina High School record for home runs in a season when the elder Brannon hit 20 homers for Kings Mountain in 1989. Brooks heard the stories, not from his father, but from friends and his father's former teammates who ran into the Brannon family, all eager to talk about the state record. Brooks said he heard all the stories, even the ones his father may not have wanted told.

Now Brooks' future children will have plenty of stories to hear about their father as a high school baseball player. And what incredible stories those will be.

Brannon and the Tigers will begin their run for a second consecutive state championship this week after the senior catcher broke the NCHSAA record for RBIs in a season with 72, smashing the old record of 62 held jointly by Murphy's Royce Peterson in 2018 and T.C. Roberson's Alex Ledford in 2011. The Tigers, who will bring a 25-1 record into the state tournament, just put the finishing touches on another Piedmont Athletic Conference regular season and tournament championships.



*Randleman senior Brooks Brannon.
Photo provided.*

Brannon, who is just four home runs shy of his father's state record for home runs in a season, was obviously a huge part of those accomplishments.

"He came in and started from day one," RHS veteran coach Jake Smith said of Brannon, a 6-foot-1, 220-pound four-year starter. "He showed a lot of promise early. He caught two Division 1 arms as a freshman in Trey Cooper and Matt Kemp. He really helped develop those guys and his work ethic in the three years after that has been amazing. He can do everything. He's as flexible a catcher as anyone can be. He's a leader. The best part about him is he's a selfless, respectful, humble and hard-working kid."

After three outstanding years at RHS, Brannon entered his senior season well rested after taking the summer off to rehab a back injury suffered when he strained some muscles during a preseason game at the beginning of his junior season. Brannon was able to play through the injury and help guide the Tigers to a state championship. He did participate in a couple of very

prestigious tournaments in the fall before his senior season, excelling in both, including Perfect Game's World Championships in Florida.

"Going down to Jupiter and facing guys who throw 92 (mph) or 93 every game and some touching 96 really helped me," Brannon said. "I had a really good tournament and gained a lot of confidence."

Confidence, yes. Arrogance, no.

"I know the difference between confidence and arrogance and arrogance is what killed a lot of good players," said Brannon, whose mother is Tina Lineberry, an Asheboro High School graduate who was inducted into the Greensboro College Hall of Fame for basketball. (I've stayed grounded) thanks to my parents and the people around me."

One of those is Smith.

"Anytime you have a kid with that ability, I just tried not to mess him up," said Smith, who won the Johnny Bench Award for being the top collegiate catcher in the country while at East Carolina in 2006. "It's been fun to work with someone who has those physical tools. People don't understand the physicality of what catching takes day in and day out and the mental part - having to be focused on every pitch. He has worked really hard to be where he is. He deserves everything he gets."



Brooks Brannon. Photo provided.

Of course, having a father who still has a state record for home runs is a great resource.

"Dad was a catcher in pro ball and he always said he was really an outfielder and more of a hitter," Brooks said. "I always had the hitting side from my dad and the catching side from Coach Smith. He's like a second dad to me. He is literally family."

After Brannon put his name in the NCHSAA record books for the most RBIs in a season in a game against Trinity, Brannon credited his teammates.

"This is 100 percent a team award," said Brannon, who has committed to play in Chapel Hill at UNC. "I wouldn't have been able to do that without the guys in front of me and behind me."

Some of those players include Trey Way, who has committed to Virginia Tech, and UNCG recruits Hunter Atkins and Braylen Hayes.

"He's the first to admit he couldn't have done it without his teammates," Smith said. "Those dudes are on base like 90 percent of the time."

After finishing as a state champion last year, Brannon said the Tigers are even more dangerous this year.

"The difference is a shift in mindset," Brannon said. "Last year, we might score 10 runs in the first inning and then we don't score for the rest of the game. This year if we score 10 runs in the first inning, we just keep going and going. It's a change in mindset."

With dozens of scouts watching Brannon's every move, he very well may have a difficult decision to make after graduation. But he is still taking everything in stride.

"It's a game, it's fun," he said. "You have to have fun."

A lot of fun and a lot of success.