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By Dennis Garcia  
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ASHEBORO - After a spectacular senior season at Rockingham County High School, and before he was required to report to Queens College where he'll continue his baseball career, Hudson Deel had to find a place to play this summer.

The Queens coaching staff told Deel it was mandatory for players to compete in the summer before he reported. Deel said he went into scramble mode.

"It was a last-minute thing and I had to figure out some places where I could play and a lot of them were already filled," Deel said.

Enter an old friend and his dad. The father of Southwestern Randolph High School's Matthew Blakenship, who had been on the same team with Deel in the past, told Deel about the prestigious Randolph County Post 45 program.

A phone call to Post 45 head coach Andrew Connor, who is also the assistant coach at SWR, and the wheels began to turn.

"Hudson's dad called (Matthew's dad) and was asking about our Legion program," Connor said. "The first time I talked to (Deel's) dad on the phone, he was asking what do I do to get him to play there."

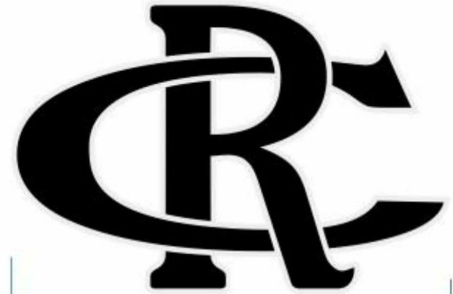
Deel had to get releases from a number of programs and once that was taken care of, he became an official part of the Post 45 program.

And everyone is glad he did.

"I was told that if he was compared to anyone, it would be Brady (Armfield)," Connor said. "I was like, I am in. They were talking about the mental and the physical part. I think it's a very good comparison. He loves being at the field."

Deel made an early impression on some of his teammates. The Deels drove to the Connor's to sign paperwork at the same time Lucas Connor and Armfield were taking cuts in the batting cages. Deel brought his equipment along and it didn't take long for the two newest players in the program - Lucas Connor and Brady Armfield - to see they had a third who would contribute in a big way.

"After we hit that day, Brady and Lucas were like, 'Man, this kid can swing the baseball bat.' All the kids were excited even before he showed up the first time for practice. They welcomed him with open arms."



Entering his first American Legion season, Deel was coming off an incredible, impressive and dominating four-year career with the Rockingham County Cougars. These numbers are simply mind-boggling.

- Freshman season - Hit .434 (23-for-53) with 22 runs, 19 RBIs and nine doubles.
- Sophomore season - Hit .396 (36-for-91) with 23 runs, 34 RBIs, six doubles, three triples and two home runs.
- Junior season - Hit .562 (45-for-80) with 37 runs, 42 RBIs, 10 doubles, six triples and five home runs.
- Senior season - Hit .471 (41-for-87) with 31 runs, 31 RBIs 10 doubles, three triples and four home runs.

In 81 total high school games played, he hit .473 (122-258), scored 91 runs, knocked in 107, hit 26 doubles, 12 triples and ripped 11 home runs.

"Seeing his stats in high school, I knew he would be a good player," Andrew Connor said. He's an impressive kid to watch."



*Hudson Deel.*

At 6-foot-0 and 205 pounds, Deel has had a stellar season for Post 45. Through the first 13 games of the season in which Post 45 was 11-2, Deel was hitting near .500 with three doubles, five home runs, 14 runs scored and 18 RBIs.

"He's jumped right in and (the team) treat each other like they have played together for years," Connor said. There is instant chemistry there. There's nothing you can't like about Hudson. He is very easy going and has an infectious personality. He'll do anything you ask and he'll help you any way possible."

Oh, by the way, Deel was recruited to Queens as a pitcher. During his four-year prep career he was 12-2 with one save and a 2.25 ERA. In 102  $\frac{2}{3}$  innings, he fanned 152.

Connor said he's talked with the Queens' coach about Deel's offensive attributes and Deel very well may be

looked at as a two-way player now for Queens.

Deel said he's enjoyed his season with Post 45, which plays its home games at McCrary Park, about a 45-minute ride from his residence.

"I've always played travel ball with the Canes," Deel said. "I really like (Legion). A lot of good extra reps. It's good competition. This means a lot to these guys and to me. They definitely made me feel comfortable. I didn't know anyone when I started. We were cool from the moment I stepped into the dugout."

Being successful certainly adds to the fun of playing Legion baseball. Post 45 already has three walk-off wins and a number of come-from-behind victories.

In his very first at-bat this summer, which was at home against Wadesboro, he hit a home run. "It took some pressure off me, led to a little bit of success," he said.

His approach at the plate is a simple one.

"Early in the count, I like to do damage," he said. "Hit drives in the gap. Late in the count, it's time to battle. Do the job. If I get out, make it a productive out."

Post 45 had back-to-back walk-off wins earlier this season, scoring twice in the bottom of the seventh against High Point and three times in the bottom of the seventh and twice in the eighth against Hamlet.

"It's a super group of guys and it was pretty cool walking off two teams in a row," Deal said. "I don't think the energy level ever fluctuates. Everyone stays up all the time and knows we are going to win. It's a gritty group of guys."

And Deel fits in rather nicely.