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ASHEBORO - When McCrary Park was being renovated, Randolph County Post 45 played some home games at Randleman High School. It was then that Jake Riddle saw first-hand what the local American Legion program was all about.

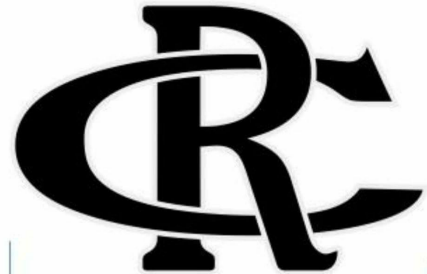
"I thought I would like to play on this team," said Riddle, who is participating in his second summer of Legion baseball with Post 45. "I talked to Coach (Andrew) Connor and to Coach (Ronnie) Pugh. It's great. I love it. I love the coaches and I love the players. It's a lot different playing with the guys you played against."

Riddle has acclimated quite well. Along with a number of his Randleman High School teammates, Riddle has become an important part of Post 45's resurgence after a down year. Mostly because of injuries, Post 45 finished 11-14 last summer, failing to make the postseason. That was Riddle's first year with the program. His second has been quite different, much more like one of the seasons this elite program has been used to having for two decades. Post 45 brings a 15-4 record into action this week, including a 6-1 record in conference play.

Post 45 closes out the regular season with games against Liberty Post 81 Tuesday at Eastern Randolph High School, at Hamlet on Wednesday and home against the Bryce Marsh-led Chatham County team Thursday.



Post 45's Jake Riddle.



"How well we mesh together and how quick it happened," Riddle said of the turnaround. "And obviously we can swing it a lot better this year. We have been talking to pitchers about just keeping runs down. It's not much of a problem if they can't score runs."

While Riddle is hitting .290 while playing second base and shortstop, he's also been a part of that pitching staff that has held opponents in check. He is 1-0 with one save and a perfect 0.00 ERA. He has walked three and struck out 12 in 10 innings of work.

"He's been in a relief role," Pugh said. "We did that intentionally because he's going to be on the field every night. There's a good chance next weekend for the playoffs

he's going to be in the starting rotation. He got a start last Sunday night and he pitched a complete game and was really sharp. I really think he loves to pitch. He's like a bulldog on the mound."

Riddle brings with him to Post 45 an expectation of winning. That's all he's known, especially since joining the Randleman Tigers. RHS has won 15 straight league championships - there was none in 2020 because of COVID19 – and Riddle has been a part of the last three. Riddle begins his senior season this fall.

Riddle said he began playing baseball at age 6 and participated in numerous travel ball organizations, including the Dirtbags when he was 15.

"They built a program around success and that helped me with what Coach Smith expects," Riddle said of RHS coach Jake Smith.

"Every year before our season, we list our goals," Riddle said of his years at RHS. "It starts with the conference and to make it to at least the fourth round of the playoffs and then the state championship. It's something every single one of us not only strives for, but it's an expectation now."

Post 45 has high expectations as well every summer and Riddle is helping to make those expectations a reality this season.

"First of all, he's like a coach on the field," Pugh said. "He understands the game and he's always looking ahead. He has a knack for understanding the game and the competitor he is helps make him the player he is."

Riddle said that Smith, who has been one of the most successful high school coaches in the state the past 15 seasons, and Pugh, who has built the Post 45 program into one of the best in the Southeast, have similar characteristics.

"Their understanding of baseball and the way they teach are similar," Riddle said. "They are going to be hard on you, but they are not going to let you be just average. They want you to be great."

Riddle is a prime example of just that.