



July 8, 2023

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SportsTone.net

ASHEBORO - Perhaps more than any other summer, this year's American Legion regular season seemed to fly by for Randolph County Post 45. After finishing the regular season at 19-3, including a second-place showing in the Northern Division at 6-2, eyes are now turned toward the playoffs as Post 45 battles Davidson County in first round action beginning Sunday. Tentatively, Game 1 is scheduled for Sunday night at McCrary Park with Game 2 set for Monday in Lexington. Game 3, if necessary, is scheduled for Tuesday at home.

The best two-out-of-three format for first-round action will be followed by a best-of-five second-round series. The winner of that series will qualify for the state tournament and earn a berth into the Area III finals.

"Things have gone pretty good so far," veteran Post 45 coach Ronnie Pugh said. "A lot of things have come up, like changing fields and graduations and now here we are turning around and we have kids going to summer school. Last week we passed strep throat around. There hasn't been one clean week. But we have a good bunch of kids and they like to play."

Things have gone well on the field. Post 45 is averaging nearly eight runs per game while giving up an average of 3.3 per contest. The team is hitting .324 and the team ERA is an outstanding 2.68.

During the regular season, the only losses Post 45 suffered were in the first of three games played against Rowan County back on May 24 and two league losses to High Point, 8-5 on June 27 and 6-3 on June 30. A forfeit win over Greensboro, two victories over Foothills and one over Chatham County gives Post 45 a four-game winning streak heading into postseason play.


"Anyone can win a two-out-of-three," Pugh said. "It's a really dangerous thing. Everyone wants to make the state tournament, but the goal should be to get the top two teams in the area into the state tournament. When you get into the three-out-of-fives and four-out-of-sevens, the best teams rise to the top. Nothing mimics a two-out-of-three."

Should Post 45 advance to second round action, it would more than likely face Rowan County (30-3 in the regular season) with the winner of that series going to the state tournament.

**AMERICAN LEGION POST 45**

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**B A S E B A L L**

STATE CHAMPIONS  2017 2008 1978 1966		REGIONAL CHAMPIONS  2019 2018 2017
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When the season opened, Post 45 had a 30-game regular season, but because of weather, stadium problems, cancellations and one team folding, that number was reduced to 22.

"One of the reasons we try to go out and find competition outside our area is for when it's time to get into the playoffs," Pugh said. "We had teams cancel games again, we had teams folding. It's really discouraging."

What hasn't been discouraging is Post 45's offense. Eight times they have scored at least 10 runs with a season-high 16 coming in its opener against Mocksville and then matched in a win over Davidson County. Tanner Marsh has had one of the most impressive seasons anyone has had in quite awhile as he entered the playoffs hitting .468 (36-for-77) with 11 doubles, two triples, five home runs, 34 runs scored and 25 RBIs. Even more impressive, in 88 plate appearances, he has struck out just three times.

But he's not alone as Tyler Parks was hitting .455 before reporting for UNC, Adam Cole was at a robust .429 before heading for ECU, Pierce Leonard is hitting .400, Braylen Hayes .375 with four home runs, 21 runs scored and 27 RBIs, Hunter Atkins is at .397 with 25 runs scored and Josh Meadows is hitting .306 with three home runs.

"They have worked hard lately," Pugh said. "We have a lot of guys who can do a lot of damage on any given night."

The pitching for Post 45 has been impressive with Samuel Asbill owning a 4-0 record and a 3.21 ERA heading into the playoffs. Drew Harmon is 3-0 with a 1.57 ERA, Robert Garner is 2-0 with a team-high 24 innings pitched and a 2.33 ERA, Connor Adams is 3-0, Austin Lemons is 3-1 with a 1.58 ERA and in 11 innings of work, Braxton Walker is 1-0 with a 1.91 ERA. Hunter Atkins hasn't given up a run in 5  $\frac{2}{3}$  innings in relief and Marsh has recorded four saves.

"The biggest thing going in, and we haven't had this opportunity the past three or four years, is having guys who are pitchers only," Pugh said. "You don't have to run them in from a position. They don't have to play one night, run them into pitching the next night and then they are back at a position the next night. Our pitching depth is as good as it has been in several years. It gives you a chance to win."

Post 45 will host the Southeast Regional Tournament once again this year and recently signed a new two-year agreement that keeps a regional tournament in Asheboro through at least 2025.

But first, their sights are set on the state tournament.