

July 11, 2026

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SportsTone.net

RAMSEUR - Like a lot of American Legion teams, when all the players were healthy and available to play, Liberty Post 81 was certainly a team that could pose a lot of problems for opponents.

But like a number of American Legion teams this summer, there just weren't many games where all the pivotal players from Post 81 were available. Between injuries, vacations and other reasons, there just weren't many games where Liberty could say it was at full strength.

With so many players out for so many different reasons, there was very little consistency when making out a lineup and that was a big hiccup in the 2026 American Legion season as Liberty, which did force a third-and-decisive game against powerful High Point in the first round of the playoffs, finished 5-15.



Post 81 head coach Nate Cockman.

"Overall, it was a fun summer and successful, not from a record standpoint, but we saw a lot of guys get individually better as the season progressed," coach Nate Cockman said. "The main goal is to try and get these guys better who are going off to play in college or for their sophomore, junior or senior year in high school. We've already had a number of players saying they want to come back next year and I think that's big when you are evaluating the success of a program."

There was some success on the field. Liberty Post 81 opened the season with one of the most incredible come-from-behind victories in program history. Liberty trailed Mocksville-Davie 9-0 and still trailed 9-2 going into the top of the seventh inning. A seven-run rally sent the game into extra innings and Post 81 emerged with a wild 13-9 win in nine innings.

This came after the first two games of the season were canceled due to rain. That became a recurring theme during the entire season as three more games were canceled, another rained out and another suspended to be finished at a later date.

"I told our guys at the beginning of the summer you have to be able to adapt," Cockman said. "Weather, vacations, cancellations. You end up sitting for six days, that's tough. Weather comes and then you have teams calling saying they can't play and that is hard. But our guys made the most of it. Whenever you go through a six- or a seven-game losing streak, it's hard to come to the park motivated, but our guys did a good job."

Liberty Post 81 started 2-2, including a 7-5 victory over Rowan County on June 1. Rowan County finished the regular season 23-3.

Liberty then saw Area III regular-season champion Randolph County score twice in the seventh for a 4-3 decision and on June 15, led Randolph County 9-0 in the fourth inning before falling 15-10.

"When you look at the games we won, we beat High Point, Rowan County and led Randolph 9-0," Cockman said. "We just didn't do a great job of closing out games. But we showed we could compete with anyone."

Liberty had its fair share of injuries as Mason Taylor was never cleared to pitch all summer after a high school injury, Cade McCallum battled a back injury all season, Maddux Dunn missed the final week or so with an injury and Westin Murphy and Jackson Vaughn played through some minor injuries. There were others as well.

"I would have loved to see if the injury bug wouldn't have bit us," Cockman said. "It would have been great to see the impact they all would have had. But night in and night out, everyone gave a great effort. I am proud of the way they came and battled every night."

Injuries, of course, give other players a chance to step up, players who may not have played a big role early in the season. But players like Josh Nelson, Carter Mustian, Hayden Robbins and Bryson Arrington were among the players who stepped in and provided positive results as the team battled in a tough Area III Northern Division.



Tyler Westbrooks.

There were some strong individual performances for the season. Tyler Westbrooks, who is headed to Lenoir Community College, hit .400 with 22 runs and seven stolen bases in 16 games. Chance Holdaway scored 11 times, knocked in 13 and led the team with three home runs. On the mound, he pitched very well in Game 2 of the first-round playoff series with High Point, hurling 6 $\frac{1}{3}$ innings in a 5-4 win. Three of the runs allowed were unearned. Landon Albright stepped in to be the No. 3 starter on the mound.

In 13 games, John Wittig hit .349 with two home runs, nine runs scored and eight RBIs. In eight games, Robbins hit .471.

On the other side, pitching was a problem as the team finished with an ERA of well above 7.00 Post 81 surrendered double-digits in runs in 11 games this season.

"We knew coming into the season we were going to set a rotation of three guys," Cockman said. "We had a good core group and Chance really came on in the end. It just wasn't as deep as we would have liked. The guys competed every night and we didn't help them every night defensively. We were playing guys in a lot of different positions they don't play a lot. Our margin of error was thin."

Too thin on a lot of occasions. But those who showed battled. They fought, they clawed and with perhaps an established closer or an extra play made here or there could have made a drastic difference in the record.

With weather, injuries and vacations, it was an unusual finish for Post 81. A finish that Cockman and his players are sure to be better next season.