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ASHEBORO - While growing up and getting ready to attend North Moore High School, Robert Garner was searching for a place to improve on the baseball field. He said he heard nothing but positive remarks about Randolph County Post 45 and so, with his twin brother Justin, headed to Asheboro to compete for the local American Legion team.

Now, years later, Garner has not only learned a great deal about pitching, but he has given Post 45 a big shot in the arm on the mound. Garner is in his third summer with the Post 45 Senior team and his contributions are a big reason the team enters this week's Southeast Regional Tournament eyeing a trip to the American Legion World Series.

"It has been a good time up there," Garner said. "There's a good coaching staff, good players and I am really enjoying it."

Garner can be described as a good ole' country boy, an easy-going laid back individual who enjoys the outdoors. But that demeanor changes once he takes the mound.

"He's a different beast when he goes to the mound," veteran Post 45 coach Ronnie Pugh said. "He goes out there and battles. He just comes to compete and you can give him the ball next Wednesday and Thursday and Friday and he would take it and go on the mound and challenge someone to beat him. He can throw for days."

Garner has appeared in 12 games this summer, starting four, and has a perfect 4-0 record. He has pitched a team-high 37 innings, allowing 30 hits and 10 earned runs for a sparkling 1.89 ERA. He has walked 12 and fanned 31 and owns one of the two complete games a talented Post 45 pitching staff has recorded.

"What you see is what you get," Pugh said of Garner. "He has picked up a lot of velocity in a couple of years and for Robert, the big thing is he throws strikes. If you have a good defense, they play even better behind you. They have to be on their toes."



*Robert Garner is playing in his final season with Post 45. Photo provided.*

For the past few summers, Garner has transitioned to a player who contributes strictly from the mound. He said that it hasn't been difficult.

"The reason I want to be a PO is that most teams struggle with pitching," he said. "I went to only pitching because you can always get more position players. I decided to stay that way."

Pugh said that hasn't stopped Garner from trying to slip in the batting cage every once in a while.



*Robert Garner. Photo provided.*

While at North Moore, Garner was the top hurler and was named the state 1-A pitcher of the year after his senior season, a season in which the Mustangs went 8-0 inside the conference and 16-2 overall.

He had a solid summer in 2022 before attending Wake Tech. In his first year there, he was one of the Eagles top hurlers, finishing 3-6 with a 4.52 ERA. He appeared in 13 games, starting 11, almost double the number of starts of the next pitcher. He hurled 65  $\frac{2}{3}$  innings, giving up 71 hits and 33 earned runs. He walked 26 and fanned 57, which is just over one per inning. The Eagles finished 17-29.

"I have one more year at Wake and then if a good college wants me to play I will go," Garner said.

Before his second year at Wake Tech, he has the American Legion SER, which is scheduled to begin

Wednesday at McCrary Park. Post 45 enters that tournament 23-6.

Garner said he'll have the same mindset he's always had.

"What I think about when I am on the mound is don't think about nothing but doing your job," he said. "Just go out there and do your job and compete. It makes me more comfortable out there knowing all I have to do is do my job because I have people backing me up. If you don't, you struggle trying to strike everyone out."

Post 45 will play Tennessee in first-round action Wednesday beginning at 7:30 p.m. at McCrary Park.