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By Dennis Garcia

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ASHEBORO - Randolph Post 45 has experienced the wide spectrum of emotions when it comes to the American Legion regional tournament over the past 11 events.

From capturing regional championships in 2017, 2018 and 2019 and moving on to the American Legion World Series, to suffering two straight losses for the first time in tournament history in 2024, Post 45 has felt all the emotions.

For the 12th time, and the last until at least 2028, Post 45 and the Asheboro ZooKeepers will be hosting regional action this week at McCrary Park as Post 45, North Carolina state champion Asheville Post 70, South Carolina state champion Richland Post 215, South Carolina runner-up Florence Post 1, Alabama champion Troy Post 70, Florida state champion Jacksonville Post 316, Kentucky state champion Owensboro Post 9 and Puerto Rico will vie for the Southeast Regional championship and a berth into the American Legion World Series.

Games start Wednesday morning and the double-elimination tournament runs through Sunday. There will be four games on Wednesday and Thursday, three on Friday, two on Saturday and either one or two on the final day to determine the champion.

While this will be the 10th Southeast Regional in Asheboro, Randolph County has also hosted the Mid-Atlantic Regional in 2019 and 2021. There was no American Legion baseball in 2020 due to the Pandemic.

The host team has had plenty of success in this tournament, winning three championships, advancing to the final day of the tournament on six occasions and holding an overall record of 32-17.

Randolph County opens Wednesday night against a fairly familiar and incredibly successful program. Post 45 will renew acquaintances with Troy Alabama Post 70, the defending regional champion who won all five games in Asheboro last season before going to Shelby to win the World Series. Troy defeated Michigan 5-3 for the World Series title. Troy has been to the last three World Series, also winning in 2022.

Post 45 is 4-0 against Troy in regional action, defeating them 6-5 and then 3-2 in the championship game in 2018; winning 10-4 in the opening round of the 2017 tournament; and recording a 7-6 win in opening the 2016 regional.



"They have had a lot of success and we've always had competitive games and we're looking forward to it," said veteran Post 45 coach Ronnie Pugh. "Even though there will be good teams here, it doesn't mean they come from a historically good program. Troy has owned Alabama for eight to 10 years now. You can see how competitive they are once they get past the state tournament."

Post 45 will bring a 23-8 record into the contest, which includes playoff series wins over Chatham County and Mooresville. Post 45 fell one round shy of advancing to the state tournament with a 3-1 loss in the best-of-five Area III semifinal series to Union County. Asheville Post 70 won the North Carolina state championship.

"We had a good week of practice and we'll get a little more work in before the tournament and hopefully we'll be ready," Pugh said last weekend. "We've been going over the little things that tend to get lost during the course of the season. Working on doing the little things correctly. Getting our pitchers back in the bullpen so we can set up our regular rotation."

Post 45 will have at least one advantage and that's in the preparation Pugh and his coaching staff will bring to the regional.

"As teams come in, you look up and see what type of information is out there," Pugh said. "We usually learn a lot about the teams. Mainly get a feel for who they played that year, who they beat and who they lost to. Pitching depth. Things they like to do. For instance, Alabama will come in here and we know they can bunt and do all the little things that you probably won't see from some of the other teams that come in."

Post 45, which captured the Area III Division 2 championship this year after finishing 11-14 a year ago, is looking to retake its place among the region's elite.

"This group has been like this all year, they are willing to work and try to get better," Pugh said. "I hope they are ready to go and we can be aggressive. This is not about playing for so many days or looking to play three or four games, we're playing to win this thing and go on."

If that's to happen, Post 45 is going to have to locate the defense it played at the beginning of the season. Post 45 started by making just 20 errors in their first 24 games. However, they have made 14 errors in the past seven.

There's no reason to believe that won't happen and with Ethan Willard (.449 average, 31 runs and 16 stolen bases), Carter Brown (.326, 20 RBIs, three home runs) and Braxton Walker (.314 with 20 RBIs) sparking the offense, Post 45 is primed to a deep run.

Hoping to benefit from that offense, which has outscored opponents 202-119 this summer, are hurlers Walker (4-1 with a 1.57 ERA), Jake Riddle (3-0 with two saves and a 1.06 ERA) and Brett Smith (two wins, a save and a 2.41 ERA). Sean Jennison, Lincoln Coble, Drew Harmon, Elijah Prince, Parker Kines and Tate Andrews will all be key on the mound if Post 45 is to make a long run.