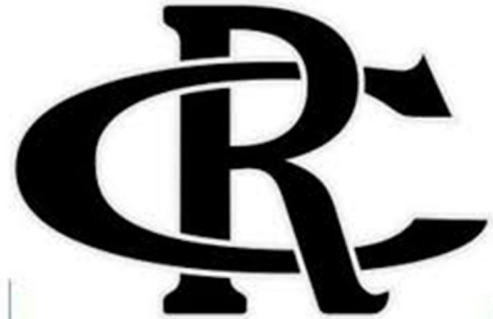




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SportsTone.net

ASHEBORO - Randolph County Post 45 has entered the American Legion Regional Tournament after all types of regular seasons. There have been years when Post 45 won the Area III Northern Division, advanced to the state tournament and either won or advanced deep in the eight-team field.



Then there have been the occasional year when Post 45 entered regional action after having a year in which goals weren't met.

But no matter how the regular season panned out, when the regional came around, head coach Ronnie Pugh, his coaching staff and the team were ready. Have they been ready!

The 2024 American Legion Southeast Tournament begins Wednesday at McCrary Park with eight teams, including six state champions, one territorial champion and Post 45 vying for a berth into the American Legion World Series, which will be held next week in Shelby. This will be the 11th regional tournament at McCrary Park and Post 45 has an impressive resume, winning the championship three times (2017, 2018, 2019), finishing second three times (2013, 2014, 2015), winning two games twice (2022, 2023) and winning one game only once (2021). In all, Post 45 has a stellar mark of 31-14 in regional play, including an 8-2 record in opening games. Post 45 will battle Chesapeake Post 280 out of Virginia Wednesday at 7:30 p.m.

"We've been working the past two weeks, healing up a little and looking forward to getting started," Pugh said late last week in preparation for this year's event. "With this group, we would have been better off during the season if we practiced. This team needed to practice. We got a chance to work on some things we haven't been able to put in."

Although none of the teams this year return from last year's tournament, five of the seven out-of-town teams have been to McCrary Park. Troy Post 70 (Alabama) was in Asheboro 2016, 2017 and 2018; Jacksonville (Florida) has been represented by a couple of different teams in 2013 and 2014; Covington Post 32 (Georgia) qualified in 2014, 2016 and 2017; Camden Post 17 won the SER in 2022 and Chesapeake Post 280 (Virginia) was part of the 2021 field. Wayne County (the North Carolina state champions) and Puerto Rico are making their initial trips to Asheboro.

Post 45 enters with an 11-12 record, only the second time it entered the tournament without a winning record. But Post 45 is not your average host team and regional participants quickly found that out when the hosts advanced to the championship game in each of the first three years of the tournament.

"We pitched it good all summer and If you can pitch it and play a little defense you give yourself a chance," said Pugh, whose teams won the regional in 2017, 2018 and 2019. "We improved offensively. I thought we were playing better when the season ended, so hopefully under the circumstances, with a lot of younger kids having that time off and the ability to practice will put us in a better position."

Post 45 hasn't played since a regular-season-ending 9-8 win over Area III champion High Point on July 2. Post 45 finished just out of what was an abridged playoff format in Area III, meaning more than a month off. The time off was used to heal some injuries suffered throughout the season and that could play a big factor in the tournament.

"We've had so many injuries, I can't remember who had what," Pugh said.

Last year, Post 45 dropped a first-round game with Tennessee, which is not in the field this year. Post 45 followed that with wins over Florida and Kentucky before falling to South Carolina, the eventual champion, 5-4 in an 11-inning thriller.

The double-elimination tournament will run through Sunday.