

All Shook up

Pitching for a national powerhouse in baseball was always a dream for senior TJ Shook, but that dream became a reality this summer when the University of South Carolina offered the right-handed pitcher a scholarship.

"I chose the Gamecocks because I've always dreamed of playing for them," TJ said.

"Ever since I was a little kid I wanted to play for the Gamecocks and go to school there."

TJ chose to close down his recruitment before the start of his senior year in order to be completely focused on school and the ultimate goal of the team.

"The number one goal is to become better and better each day, as a team and as a player," TJ said. "But the overall goal for the season is obviously to win a state championship. That's been the goal for every season."

Head baseball coach Casey Waites believes that things are finally starting to pay off for TJ.

"He's one of our hardest workers on the team," Waites said. "He's been working since the summer in the weight room and on the field, but he still has work to do."

Junior pitcher Jordan Beatson is confident that TJ's work ethic makes him a leader on the team.

"He never has an off day, basically; he always is doing something not only to improve hitting or throwing, but his endurance, health, and strength," Jordan said.

The coaching staff also believes that TJ has the ability to lead the team.

"He leads by example. He's not necessarily a 'Ra Ra' guy but he does what we ask him to do and everyone follows," Waites said about TJ. "We want him to be a leader on the mound and be one of the top hitters on the team with the guys we have coming back."

Jordan and the rest of the team feed off of the positive energy that TJ brings to the diamond.

"TJ is someone who allows his ability to serve as something that can build motivation for the team," Jordan said. "He is someone who can build momentum up with a good play or a nice hit, or the way he reacts when things don't go the way we want can motivate us to stay up and continue playing the way we know how."

The recruiting process is often difficult for young athletes, but TJ had some of the pressure lifted off his shoulders with the help of his coaches.

"They [the coaches] definitely helped. They were there for support and they could contact other schools if needed," TJ said.

Coach Waites has high expectations for the baseball team this upcoming season.

"The overall goal for the team is to advance through the playoffs and go farther than we did last year," Waites said. "We want to try and catch up to what the the football, girls basketball, and girls cross country teams did and win a state championship."

The players have the same aspirations as the coaching staff for the 2015-16 season.

"Our goals are even higher than last year, not only do we want to win region again but a state championship appearance seems possible with the team we have." Jordan said. "TJ can help by doing his part and being a leader throughout the season"

TJ can find motivation no further than his own mother, who has been one of his biggest fans ever since he started playing baseball.

"I'm very happy for TJ, I'm excited that his dream came true. We're all excited that we will be able to go to all the home games and see him play!" TJ's mother Donna Shook said.

Choosing a school to spend your college career at is no easy task but for TJ, choosing the University of South Carolina, a mere 20 minutes away from home, was an easy choice.

"It [being so close] played a big part," TJ said. "I feel like I'm right at home."