



## **ALL-AREA: Aycocock's Hampton named baseball pitcher-of-the-year**

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PIKEVILLE -- Charles B. Aycocock head coach Charles Davis remembers it like it was yesterday.

It was the spring of 2011 and freshman Bobby Hampton was getting his first taste of playing for the varsity team. A pitcher first, Davis thought it better to ease the 14-year-old into the role by putting him in center field instead.

"As a freshman, he never pitched for us," Davis said. "At the beginning he was almost like a deer in the headlights."

"I was the youngest one on the team," Hampton added. "And I only knew a couple of guys on the team. I was just trying to step up into a role."

Fast forward four years and Hampton's role on the Golden Falcons' baseball team is a bit more defined --the lefty is as unquestionably the team's ace as he is one of their clubhouse leaders.

Hampton, the 2015 News-Argus All-Area pitcher-of-the-year, has career numbers that resemble video game statistics -- a 22-8, a 1.13 earned run average (ERA), 287 strikeouts and 191 2/3 innings pitched.

During his senior year, Hampton posted a 10-3 record and 0.71 ERA with 110 strikeouts in 79 innings. It, undoubtedly, was his campaign on the bump.

They're eye-popping numbers that have him going to Boone next fall to pitch for Appalachian State. Ask anyone, and they'll tell you that it's an impressive feat.

Anyone but Hampton, that is.

"Bobby's never been worried about the individual stats," Davis said. "All he cares about is how the team does."

A cliché? Yes.

But that doesn't make it false. When asked about how he improved this year, Hampton gave a brief answer before diverting the conversation into about how the other players on this year's state championship runner-up all played huge roles.

"I feel like I stepped up this year, but so did Hank (Smitherman) and Jake (Naughton)," he said. "Just because I'm the pitcher doesn't mean I'm the only leader. All three of us were leaders, but all the other seniors stepped up for us as well."

Being naturally talented and left-handed were two strokes of luck that happened to fall Hampton's way. The rest of the success, according to Davis, comes from a work ethic that set an example for the rest of team.

That, and a filthy curveball.

"With Bobby, we just knew that he was going to be good on the mound," Davis said. "Plus, he has a great curveball for a left hander. Most don't, but he does."

"The thing that he's been able to do this year is keep his pitch count down. He's cut down his walks and developed a changeup this year."

As a left-hander who throws in the low 90's with three 'plus' pitches, it's a wonder how he slipped through the Division I recruiting cracks. All the better for Appalachian State, which landed one of the best pitchers in North Carolina -- a superlative he proved when he went toe-to-toe with

Gatorade Athlete-of-the-Year and Marvin Ridge pitcher Max Wotell in the first game of the N.C. High School Athletic Association state 3-A championship series.

Wotell relinquished his scholarship to the University of Arizona getting selected 88th overall in the 2015 Major League Baseball First-Year player draft. Hampton plans to head up into the mountains and get the most of his collegiate eligibility.

"I chose App because I've been going to the mountains for so long," he said. "We always go skiing up there. I really love the mountains. The cold gets to me sometimes, but I've always loved it.

"It's going to be different. I plan on being there three of four years. The more and more you play somewhere, the more used to it you get"

While he has some work to do as a pitcher, Davis knows that Hampton's already made leaps and bounds of progress in another aspect.

"Over the four years here, I've seen him mature more and more," he said. "I've seen him grow into a fine young man."

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