



Brooks Helton is being recruited as a pitcher, but he's solid with the bat as well. As a junior, Helton hit .343 with 28 RBIs.

Jeffery Simmons photo

Helton

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While Helton has plenty of time to make more highlights, he believes one of his most cherished memories on the diamond already happened while representing Warren County on a 10-year-old All-Star team.

"My fondest memory, and it may stay this way the rest of my life, is when I was 10 and we had a group that went and won the state tournament and went on to play in Raleigh," said Helton. "I had more fun in that tournament than I've ever had. Back then, we were just playing because we had fun.

"One of my favorite memories will always be going to the beach and playing baseball with

my buddies."

Helton has a trip scheduled to visit Faulkner University in the near future. The allure of the small campus made it an easy fit for Helton, along with a persistent and caring coaching staff.

"It's a good baseball program and the coaching staff got to me early. They really cared about me before anybody else did," said Helton, who started getting calls about college at age 14. "It's a good fit. The Church of Christ had some influence and I always wanted to go to a small school."

Helton, owner of a 31 ACT score and a 4.0 GPA, plans on majoring in pre-engineering before persuing a master's degree in aerospace engineering.

Travel ball

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"I think the city leagues are valuable tools. If you look at our high school team, all those girls started at the Civic Center. This is what sparks their love of the game," said Hollis. "Once that love of the game develops though, they are searching for something more competitive.

"What we've seen in our experience with the local league is too many coaches want to stack a team. They don't want to coach or teach the game. Coaches at all levels need to be teaching the fundamentals."

If travel ball is affecting youth participation, it's not because of easy access. Travel ball usually takes a greater time and monetary commitment without the guarantee of an at-bat or an inning in the field.

Hollis believes travel ball is a culmination of the cream rising to the top, separated by a burning passion to play.

"There has to be a true love to play travel ball. It takes a huge commitment from the kids and the parents," said Hollis. "Kids miss friends' birthday parties, summer pool parties and just hanging out with friends. We play and practice in 100-degree heat. These kids have a drive to

compete at all levels."

Charlie Adams coached Brent's Computers to a championship in the 9-11 baseball league this season. His roster was loaded with several players who participate on his travel team – the Swhackers. A lackluster season full of blowouts has Adams considering other options next season.

"I don't think we're playing next year, nor is most of my travel team," said Adams. "I don't agree with the age groups. We're not able to teach the right things.

"I don't think there's enough attention being paid to the kids."

Beard is hopeful it doesn't come to that, because he thinks the league is still a valuable product.

"Some of the travel ball coaches won't let their kids play in the league, which makes no sense to me. I think league ball can be pretty good practice," said Beard.

City organizers are looking to potential solutions to attract more travel ball players back to McMinnville Civic Center before it is too late.

Travel ball has arrived and has \$15 billion reasons to stay.

Sports editor Jeffery Simmons can be reached at 473-2191.



Jeffery Simmons photo

Flamethrower Jarren Harris pitched Brent's Computers to a championship Friday, striking out 11 in a 7-4 win over Moose Lodge.

Brent's

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Following the title game, Harris was given the game ball by the umpires to commemorate his big night.

Corban Felton started the scoring in the first inning. Brent's Computers fiery lead-off blasted a double to get into scoring position, where he'd eventually score on T-Bone Adams' sacrifice. Felton and Williams led their team with two hits apiece, while Taylor and Rivers had the only other hits for Brent's Computers.

Miller went pitch-for-pitch with Harris early, striking out four before Brent's Computers erupted for six runs in the third. Williams' two-out shot to right field was a backbreaker, as it doubled Brent's Computers lead after he had fought off potential inning-ending strikes twice.

Miller finished with seven strikeouts in four innings of work. Andrew Key pitched the fifth for Moose Lodge (9-3) and struck out two.

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