

WH Warrior Nine Eliminate Blue Devils, 12-2, in Playoffs

By DAVID RIGGS
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

WESTFIELD — The Westfield High School baseball team's outstanding run into the state playoffs came to a screeching halt on May 26 in the NJSIAA North Jersey, Section II, Group IV quarterfinal when Watchung Hills put on an incredible hitting display in a five-inning, 12-2 victory at Edison Intermediate School.

Winners of the Union County Tournament and the Watchung Conference, the 20-7 Blue Devils entered the sectional playoffs as the third seed, while the 17-6 Warriors were seeded sixth.

Despite the Blue Devils' statistical and home field advantage, they could not stop the Warriors from winning their ninth consecutive game. The Warriors got 15 hits off of three WHS pitchers and scored all of their runs in the final two innings. Westfield on the other hand, started off strong but was then held in check by the superb pitching of Adam Rivera (5-3).

"They came out to play and were not afraid," Blue Devil Head Coach Bob Brewster said of Watchung Hills. "Everything they hit, they found the seams. Coach Diez puts a great team out there."

Senior Craig Ellis (7-2) started for Westfield and had a terrific first three innings. He mowed down the Warrior batters 1-2-3 in the first and third innings, and fought back from a lead-off single by Rivera and a walk in the second-inning to keep Watchung Hills scoreless.

Westfield's bats were also quiet in the first inning, but they came alive in

the second with the middle of the order. The senior tandem of first baseman Alex Zierler (1-for-2) and third baseman Jay Anderson (1-for-2) began the inning with back-to-back singles. Then sophomore right fielder Justin Olsen (2-for-2) ripped a two RBI single to the right side that sailed over the head of Warrior first baseman Joe Giaimo, scoring Zierler and Anderson. Olsen reached third base, but Ellis was unable to send him home and the inning ended with his fly out.

"I was thinking fastball and I ended up getting it," Anderson said. "I was looking for a first pitch to hit and I got it."

Although the Blue Devils got on the scoreboard first, 2-0, Rivera settled down to give up just two more hits the rest of the afternoon. Even when it appeared that Westfield would score again in the third with runners in scoring position, Rivera got Zierler to ground into a fielder's choice and Anderson to fly out to leftfield to end the inning.

"After the first two runs, I thought we could keep it going, but there was nothing we could do," Anderson said.

In the fourth inning, Ellis went back on the mound to try and continue his strong pitching performance. Instead, he was met with five runs on seven consecutive hits by Watchung Hills. Shortstop Brandon Edwards (3-for-4, 2 RBI, HR) got the rally started with a single and Rivera (3-for-3, BB) followed with a double to deep leftfield. Joe Walsh hit a two-run single to tie the game and catcher Chris DeCosimo smashed an RBI

double. By the time the inning was over, the Warriors had a commanding 7-2 lead and Ellis had been taken out of the game for Josh Gerckens.

"Craig was doing a nice job at the start, but then left the ball over the plate too much," said Brewster.

Things got even worse for the Blue Devils in the fifth inning when, with one out, centerfielder Jeff D'Annunzio (2-for-3) hit a stand-up triple. His hit opened the floodgates once again, as Westfield gave up five runs, which were capped off by a two-run home run by Edwards.

The five runs set up the 10-run mercy rule situation for WHS. Despite having their best and most experienced part of the lineup due up in the bottom of the fifth (seniors Mike Diaz, Mike Murray and Tom Ricciuti), Rivera concluded his dominant performance with a quick 1-2-3 inning.

It was a bittersweet end to a great season for the Blue Devils.

"I am proud of this team," Brewster said. "They battled all the way this year and showed strong character. Winning counties was great for us."

The end of the season also marks the end of the high school careers for Westfield's 10 seniors.

"A generation is leaving," continued Brewster. "We will have to fill a lot of big holes."

As for the Warriors, they advance to the sectional semifinals to face second-seeded Bayonne.

Lady Blue Devils Whip Warriors, 5-0, in Semis

Lindsay Brown tossed a four-hitter, struck out nine and walked one to lead the Westfield High school softball team to a 5-0 victory over 11-10 Watchung Hills in the semifinals of the North Jersey, Section 2, Group 4 tournament in Westfield on May 30.

In the bottom of the second inning, Jenny LaSpata cracked a solo home run and Jess Moskowitz scored on an infield error to give the 14-9 Blue Devils a 2-0 lead. In the fourth, Cyndil Matthew (3-for-4, 1 run) tapped a single, dashed to second on a wild pitch and scored on a throwing error. Moskowitz's bunt. Moskowitz later scored on a throwing error.

The Blue Devils' fifth run came in the sixth when Jenn Urcovoli poked an RBI single to right field.

The Blue Devils were to face top-seeded No. 7 North Hunterdon on June 1 for the championship.

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David Riggs for The Westfield Leader and The Times

PITCHING A GEM...Watchung Hills pitcher Adam Rivera gave up just two runs in a complete game performance against Westfield. The Warriors defeated the Blue Devils 12-2, and moved on to the semifinal round in the state sectional playoffs.



PERFECT THROW & TAG...Raider shortstop Melissa Sette makes a perfect toss to catcher Lauren Mains as a Nutley runner attempts to score in the third inning in the state quarterfinals on May 25.

Nutley Softball Girls Blank SPF Raiders, 3-0, in Sections

By FRED LECOMTE
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

Silent bats and fielding miscues cost the Scotch Plains-Fanwood High School softball team advancement into the quarterfinals of the North Jersey, Section 2, Group 3 Tournament when Nutley took advantage of those opportunities and combined them with timely hitting and superb pitching to grab a 3-0 victory in Scotch Plains on May 25.

Nutley right-handed pitcher Kelly Rauco turned in a solid one-hit, three walk and six strikeout performance. Although not totally on top of her game, Raider pitcher Elaine Piniat, kept control and struck out four while awarding no free passes. At the plate, Nutley manufactured 10 hits.

"It's not always about wins and losses, but how the game is played," said Raider Head Coach Nancy Covert. "The hard work, chemistry, camaraderie of the team brought by was first class. We hit every single one of our goals. I don't want them to walk away feeling sad but I just know they deserved to be in that semifinal and final game."

The Raiders found themselves on the wrong side of the momentum in the top of the first when Nutley seized

a 1-0 lead on a two-out single and an RBI double to short center by Jessica Sneddon. The lone scoring opportunity came up short for the Raiders in the bottom of the inning.

Piniat worked a walk on seven pitches. A fly out to center advanced the runner to second and the next batter watched a called third strike. Allie Brown, however, slapped a single to right, putting runners on the corners. But failure to capitalize on a grounder kept the momentum with Nutley.

The Nutley Raiders offered no offensive threat until the sixth inning when Stephanie Pavone and Lia Jova singled. Piniat made a great play on a grounder and Kaskiw responded with a running snag. Jill Donati stepped to the dish and drilled a shot up the middle, but an interference call and an overthrow to first allowed the two runners to cross home plate.

"We went 11-0 in the beginning of the season but then near the end we entered an extremely tough schedule," said senior shortstop Melissa Sette. "Many of the teams that we beat came back gunning for us the second time around. We had good games, however, our bats were not as strong in the second half of the season. I told the girls in the huddle that

I don't think I could have had a better season with the girls because we had so much fun."

Centerfielder Kelli Kaskiw added, "First of all, I want to thank you and The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times for covering all of the games. Personally, I don't think it mattered that we lost. Knowing us, we are going to go out and party because we know and played together for such a long time. I am so thankful to everyone on the team and everyone is thankful to have each other and that is what's important, so it does not matter how we ended it."

An emotional Rutgers-bound Piniat said, "It was the most memorable and great season for me. Most of all, I will remember the closeness and the continuation of that closeness, the fun practices and the goal to win. I could not have asked for more."

Summarizing the end to the season, Colvert added, "It's just tough, but that's softball. I firmly believe that there are people who are softball players and people who play softball, and I have softball players. The difference is that they play their hearts out and play the game. What you love about the game and hate about the game is what keeps you coming back."

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