

JP Stevens Hawks Mesmerize Blue Devil Softball Girls, 5-0

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

Alyssa Errico tossed a four-hitter and Tori Ferrante hit a three-run home run to lead seventh-seeded J.P. Stevens past the second-seeded Westfield High School softball team, 5-0, in the North Jersey, Section 2 Group 3 quarterfinals in Westfield on May 24.

Errico (4-0) baffled the 17-7 Blue Devils with her fastball and off-speed pitch, fanning seven and walking one. Relief pitcher Kristine Rosko provided two strikeouts. Blue Devil pitcher Lindsay Brown allowed eight hits, struck out six and walked one. Katie Kiefer, Katie Abruzzo, Cyndil Mathew and Kim Townsend each contributed a hit.

"We were really disappointed because we all know we certainly did

not play our best game; very far from it. We were timid and back on our heels," said Westfield Head Coach Tara Pignoli. "I tried to emphasize to them to show no fear, be aggressive and go after it. Lindsay did her job but she could have pitched a little better. J.P. Stevens is a good hitting team and a lot of those runs just came on ground balls in the infield."

Tori Ferrante's homer and Leah Ferrante's double led the 12-10 Hawks. Despite committing several miscues, the Blue Devils made several outstanding defensive plays, including some nice running grabs by shortstop Townsend and second baseman Ariel Gole. Rightfielder Abruzzo made a circus-like snag and Mathew made a heads-up grab at third and threw a runner out at home.

Ferrante doubled then scored on back-to-back throwing miscues. Later, Caroline Vitale tapped an RBI single. Matthew stopped the bleeding with a perfect throw to Kiefer at home who slapped on the tag.

"I tried to mix it up, keep them off balance, throw as hard as I can and put my heart into it," said Brown. "We were not focused, our heads were somewhere else and we were not aggressive. We were scared up there and we did not hit the ball."

Westfield's best scoring chance came in the sixth with Townsend and Matthews on base. Unfortunately, they were stranded.

"Our pitch selection was bad. We were swinging at high pitches and we did not adjust to the pitchers' slower speed at all. We did have a couple of hard-hit balls that did not drop. Our short game worked nicely and a couple of bunts we laid down were successful," said Pignoli.

"We really turned this season around. I mean, we had a young team, and we really showed people what we were capable of," said LaSpata amidst tears following the game. "(The girls are) like first sisters. They're like my family. I see them more times a week than I see my own sister. I love those girls. It's just really hard to face that this is the end."

"We didn't come out as strong as we can. We have great talent on our team, and we just didn't play up to our game today," added Tri-Captain Ashley Dunnan. "The team has improved so much. It's really sad to end with a loss because we've put so much work into the season."

"I think it is disappointing to see that mental toughness and aggressiveness led to our downfall, something we tried very hard to work on. If we take a couple of steps back and look at our scrimmages, we were struggling very, very much and I was having trouble putting a lineup together that would work," concluded Pignoli. "This team got it together once we started games. They came out of the gates strong so I believe they had a very good season but certainly big disappointments in both of the tournaments."



BATTLING A HAWK...Blue Devil third baseman Cyndil Matthew gets down and dirty in an attempt to make the tag on Hawk Leah Ferrante. Despite the great effort, the ball came loose in the fifth inning.

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"Cyndil has really quick hands at third and does a really nice job defending the line. Ariel has done a fantastic job. She covers lots of ground and has a real strong arm. Jenny (LaSpata) is a tough kid at first. I put her there because she would never let the ball go by. She made a couple of nice stretches and picked two balls out of the dirt," said Pignoli.

The Hawks grabbed a 3-0 lead in the top of the second when Kim Sharback and Katrina Howard singled and Tori Ferrante followed with a blast to deep left. In the fifth, Leah

and aggressiveness led to our downfall, something we tried very hard to work on. If we take a couple of steps back and look at our scrimmages, we were struggling very, very much and I was having trouble putting a lineup together that would work," concluded Pignoli. "This team got it together once we started games. They came out of the gates strong so I believe they had a very good season but certainly big disappointments in both of the tournaments."

J.P. Stevens	030	020	0	5
Westfield	000	000	0	0



ON A SCORING FRENZY...Blue Devil midfielder Ryan Yarusi, No. 4, whipped in 10 goals and added an assist against Cherry Hill West in a 20-7 victory.

Blue Devil Laxmen Bombard CHW Lions, 20-7, in Group 3

By DAVID B. CORBIN
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

Senior attacker Joey Simone provided the ammo and midfielder Ryan Yarusi penetrated the seam and became the primary marksman in the seventh-ranked Westfield High School boys lacrosse team's 20-7 bombardment of 11-7 Cherry Hill West (CHW) in the first round of the Group 3 tournament at Gary Kehler Stadium in Westfield on May 23.

Simone contributed eight assists and punched in two second-quarter goals, while Yarusi hit the target a career-high 10 times and added a fourth-quarter assist for the 13-5 Blue Devils. Junior attacker Harry Bernstein got into the act with two goals and four assists. Middle Luke Baron hopped in a goal and added an assist, and Andrew Rosenberg stuffed in two goals. Peter Cornell, Brandon West and Tim Werner each netted a goal.

"We executed the way I wanted us too. We mixed up our shots and shot the way to make it harder for the goalie and that's what we wanted, going forward. We don't want those rips up high. We wanted to take the higher percentage shots. The kids listened today. They didn't get selfish. They played together and moved the ball around," said Blue Devil Head Coach Gerry Benaquista. "We knew

we were coming into a game where we were the better team but there's still the difference between executing and not executing. We executed today!"

Filling in for starting goalie Ben Thomas, sophomore Kyle Wright made nine fine saves in the second half to go with a few in the second quarter.

"Ben has been one of the leaders of our team. We keep him out there when we need to. We thought that Kyle could come in and finish it off for us, and he did," commented Benaquista.

The Blue Devils also won the ground ball game, 40-20. Middle Chris Mattes won 22 of 25 faceoffs and Baron took two faceoffs and won both of them. The Blue Devils also had a 49-23 advantage in shots on goal. CHW Lion goalie Sam Lyons made 20 saves.

The Blue Devils treated the first quarter like a lame turkey shoot, bagging seven goals to the CHW Lions' zero. All of the goals came at close range and Yarusi netted five of the last six after Bernstein nailed the first goal with 10:27 on the clock. West, assisted by Baron, flicked in the sixth goal. From behind the net, Simone set up five assists.

CHW's first goal came early in the

second quarter when the shot was actually stopped but the goalie's back-reflex action dropped it over the line. The Blue Devils answered with three straight goals, with Werner converting a rebound, Yarusi adding a stuff and Simone skidding one in. CHW's Austin Thomas scored a goal and teammate Andrew Hohwald followed with the first of his four goals to make the score 10-3. Rosenberg, Baran and Simone, respectively, closed out the half with goals.

The scoring frenzy eased a bit in the second half when the Blue Devils gave their bench more playing time. Cornell and Rosenberg each hit a goal and Yarusi added two as the Blue Devils won the third quarter, 4-2. AJ Mercincavage scored both of the Lions' goals.

The Blue Devils won the final quarter, 3-2, with Yarusi hitting two more and Bernstein sealing the cap. Hohwald scored both Lion goals.

"We know each other. We play well together. This is what we should be doing," said Benaquista. "These guys have played together their whole life and now they are seniors. This is it! I expect them to play hard from here on out. Good things will happen if they keep playing like that."

Cherry Hill W	0	3	2	2	7
Westfield	7	6	4	3	20

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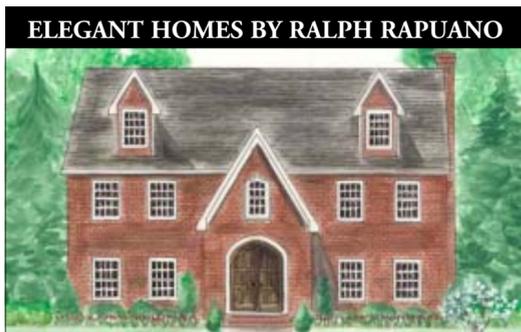
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