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# LOPEZ SQUEEZES GALE HOME; DIEU RAPS 2 HITS, 2 RBI

## Baseball Raiders Rally to Beat Westfield in Rivalry Game, 5-4

By ALEX LOWE  
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

Rick Lopez dropped down a perfectly placed suicide squeeze bunt that scored Willy Gale on third base with the winning run in the bottom of the seventh inning for Scotch Plains-Fanwood in a 5-4 victory over Westfield on May 7 in Scotch Plains. Lopez, a late game insertion, faced Blue Devil relief pitcher Christopher Ho with one out and the bases filled. "I didn't come into the game until late as a pinch hitter," said Lopez. "But I was sitting in the dugout timing him up. I like to do that with every pitcher because I never know when I might have to go into a game and contribute in a big spot. I noticed that he was starting a lot of hitters off with curveballs in his first inning of work. Then I noticed in the second inning that he worked, he switched over to throwing more fastballs to start off hitters and he seemed to be having trouble getting that pitch over the plate. So I felt like I was going to see a heater from him as the first pitch and it was exactly that. It was low, thankfully. I guessed that down 1-0, he was going to come back with another fastball. He got it to a 1-1 count and I got the squeeze sign and I was able to lay the ball down in front of the plate and the rest was all Willy Gale."

Lopez delivered a perfect tap that slow-rolled between the catcher and a diving Ho, who tried to sweep the ball towards his catcher in a desperate

of one-run games that the Raiders have played this year.

"We started off the season losing a lot of these one run games," said Lopez. "I think we understood how it felt to be so close to winning and to just let them slip away. Most of the time it was our fault. I think we could have fixed things. Now we are clicking on all cylinders at the right time. It

ground out to second. Michael Dieu smacked an RBI double off the centerfield fence. Westfield starter Michael Carlone managed to get Cucurullo to ground back to the mound to end the inning.

The Raiders tied the game at 4-4 in the fifth inning. Canavan tapped a leadoff bunt single then stole second base. Canavan later scored from third



Dividing safely to first...Raider Mike Dieu dives safely over first base as Blue Devil first baseman Danny Kohler gets the throw.

shows what a team can do when it becomes comfortable in these situations."

In this one, the Raiders were nearly

on Dieu's, two-out, infield single. Dieu's slow roller caused Blue Devil second baseman Christian Pansini to make a charging effort while falling forward as he flicked to first. But Dieu dove in headfirst to beat the play. The run was critical as Carlone struck out the next batter, Tyler Stines, to end the inning.

"That is part of the high school game...bunting," said Westfield Head Coach Robert Brewster. "Scotch Plains always does a nice job with bunting the ball. They do it really well."

Ho relieved Carlone in the sixth inning and he was nothing short of sensational, striking out two batters and setting the Raiders down in order. Ho, who had struck out eight of nine batters he faced in a relief appearance against Union Catholic a week earlier, however struggled with control in the seventh. He walked the bases loaded, while getting just one out before Lopez delivered on the suicide squeeze.

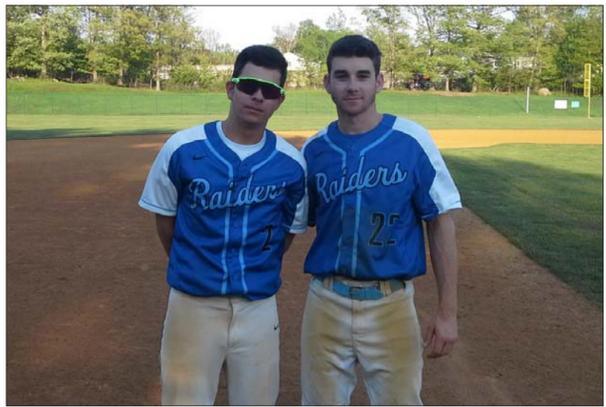
"The first inning he was fantastic," said Brewster. "He starts thinking about things too much. Get the ball and throw it in the strike zone. That is it. He is gifted with a great arm, so he has to throw the ball in the strike zone. Get ahead in the count and work from there. He is only a sophomore. I think he is going to be a real good one eventually."

Dieu had two hits and two RBI and Canavan had two hits and scored twice. Mike Urbano pitched two innings of scoreless relief to earn the win for the Raiders. Westfield was paced by Dan Kohler who had two hits and an RBI. Ho was charged with the loss in relief.

Scotch Plains-Fanwood would face Governor Livingston in the Union County Tournament semifinals. The Raiders entered the tournament as the number six seed but they have been hot of late and will send ace starter Dan Wilkinson to the hill against the second seeded Highlanders.

"It is tough to beat a team three times in a season and that is what GL is going to have to do against us," said Lopez.

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"SQUEEZING" OUT THE WIN...Raider Willy Gale, No. 22, scored on Ricky Lopez's (No. 2) squeeze bunt to beat the Blue Devils 5-4.

attempt to beat Gale to the plate. Even had Ho been able to field the ball cleanly there was no way he would have gotten Gale in time as the speedy senior was almost home by the time the ball reached Ho.

"I saw him when he looked towards me then immediately lifted his leg and went towards home with the ball," said Gale. "So I just took off running and trusted my teammate Ricky Lopez to get the bunt down."

The game winning play helped the Raiders climb all the way back from a 4-0 deficit. It was the latest in a series

blown out of it early when Westfield pushed four runs across the plate in the top of the third inning. The Blue Devils got a two-out rally going against Raider starter Patrick Cucurullo that was helped by a pair of Raider errors. Dan Kohler rapped an RBI single and Ho added an RBI double off of the leftfield fence.

The Raiders answered with three runs in the bottom of the third inning. Josh Canavan delivered a high popup that found its way onto the outfield grass behind second base for an RBI single. Matt Delgado added an RBI

volved in 12 one-run games, winning six and losing six. They also won a game by two runs and lost a game by two runs this season.

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South Plainfield 110 100 2 5  
Sc PI-Fanwood 110 001 0 3  
Colonia 001 001 0 2

## Raiders Nipped by Tigers, 5-4; Edge Colonia Patriot Nine, 3-2

The Scotch Plains-Fanwood High School baseball team fell short to the South Plainfield Tigers, 5-4, in South Plainfield on May 8 then recovered to nip the Colonia Patriots, 3-2, in Colonia on May 9.

With the game knotted 3-3, against the Tigers, the Raiders scored once in the top of the seventh but South Plainfield answered with two runs to seize the victory. TJ Massaro went 3-for-3 with a triple and scored twice for the 14-7 Tigers. Willy Gale went 2-for-2 with a double and a run scored for the Raiders. Josh Canavan had two singles, Angelo DiNizo doubled and Dallas Lorenzetti singled, scored once and had an RBI. Jonny Ramos singled, was hit by a pitch and swiped a base. Matt Delgado had an RBI.

Against the 7-13 Patriots, Josh Sklarin pitched 5.1 innings to pick up the win and Mike Urbano relieved with one out in the fifth. Lou Matten went 2-for-3 with a triple, an RBI and a run scored for Colonia and Chris Waldron singled and scored once.

The 12-8 Raiders have been in-

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TIME TO CELEBRATE...The Raiders swarm pitcher Danny Wilkinson after defeating Governor Livingston the UCT semifinal game at Kean University on May 11. The Raiders won 6-2 and would face AL Johnson for the title.

## Raiders 'Small Ball' GL; Win UCT Semi, 6-2

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 9

pitch, stole second then scored on Grill's single to left-center. Grill's courtesy runner, Nicky Leonardi was gunned down by Raider catcher Chris Smith as he attempted to steal second.

The Raider second inning began with a leadoff walk to Pat Cucurullo (1-for-2, 2 runs, RBI). Smith took a fastball to the foot then Lorenzetti plopped down his perfect bunt single that forced Grill to throw wildly over the first baseman's outstretched glove as Cucurullo and Smith's courtesy runner Ricky Lopez scored.

"I was just trying to get it down. We had runners on. Just trying to move then over then the next guy can hit them in. Fortunately he threw it away and we got both in right there," Lorenzetti explained.

Raider Mike Dieu got the ball rolling in the third inning with a single past third.

"I have been working on my swing lately. I have been swinging pretty confidently. Grill is a good pitcher and he hits his spots and I was able to get a hold of a curveball and put it into left. I was happy that got the momentum going for the team. The energy it started was more important than the hit, so we just kept going," Dieu said.

That energy did frazzle the Highlanders which led to additional errors and the Raiders capitalized. Tyler Stines reached on an error as Dieu skid around third and had to stay put. Cucurullo ricocheted an infield RBI single that also caused another throwing error.

"I was ahead in the count. They were playing the infield in. Fortunately I hit it hard off the guy's glove and it went to centerfield. I have been struggling a bit at the plate but it's awesome for me to know these guys have confidence in me whenever I go

up to the plate," Cucurullo said.

Then Chris Smith gave the Raiders a 6-1 lead with his line drive RBI single to left.

"He's been great all year," Cucurullo expressed. "He's stepped up big time. At the beginning of the year, he wasn't hitting that much. For him to come up big in a spot like that, it shows how great of a player he is and what he can do."

"They [GL] have a big reputation. We just tried to put things together, have the momentum on our side and move on from that," Lorenzetti said.

"We put the ball in play early and put a few bunts down. That really helped us out. We got guys who can do that well and a few guys who can run. It put a little bit of pressure on their defense. They are a good defensive team but today we were lucky that there were a few plays they couldn't make," Coach Higgins said.

DeFeo, however, had the Raiders' number as he held them scoreless, allowing only one hit and walking none for the remainder of the game, while recording seven strikeouts.

"We haven't hit him ever. I believe we faced him in relief all three times this year and once last year, and we've never done anything. He mixes it up," Coach Higgins expressed.

The final Highlander threat came in the sixth when Mike DeSordi singled and Compton walked with one out but Wilkinson fanned Andy Serretti and got Grill to ground out back to the mound.

Close games have been the story line with the Raiders this season. The Raiders had 12 games decided by one run and they won six and lost six. They also had two games decided by two runs, winning one and losing one.

At the beginning of the season, the Raiders were on the short side of those decisions but the tables have since been turned.

"When I got called up, we played a lot of close games but I think the one thing that helped us was teamwork. We are playing as a team, we are playing good, we are pretty comfortable," Lorenzetti said.

"We always have the mentality of going out there and competing. Some of those games just didn't go our way. That's going to happen. That's baseball. We stuck together and we put games together and we knew we could win," Cucurullo said.

"Regardless of the outcome, having played so many close games, we are more relaxed in such a tight situation. I think that allows us to perform better. We know we can come back. We know what we are capable of," Dieu said.

"That just shows how we changed as a team. Coming from then till now shows how much we matured, shows how much we are dedicated to the sport," Wilkinson said.

On May 15 at Kean University, the Raiders would face the fourth-seeded AL Johnson Crusaders, 10-7 winners over the eighth-seeded Summit Hilltoppers, for the UCT crown.

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Gov Livingston 100 010 0 2

## WF Lac Ladies Whip West Deptford, 23-13

Defense took a seat to offense as the Westfield High School girls lacrosse team erupted with 12 goals in the first half and added another 11 to whip hosting West Deptford, 23-13, on May 7. Paige Radice stuffed in seven goals and added an assist, while Olivia Shields netted a pair of goals and added five assists for the 8-7 Blue Devils.

Liz Healy and Nicole Scheuermann each scored three goals. LJ Kehler and Mikaela Buoscio each scored twice and had an assist. Carleyarella scored twice. Kellie Leuthold and Maggie Aslanian each added a goal and an assist.

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