

***SIRAGUSA BLASTS TWO HOME RUNS, MORENO BANGS HOMER, SCHAEFER GETS TWO RBI***

# Cougars Plate Eight in 1st, Rap Softball Blue Devils, 12-4

By **FRED LECOMTE**

*Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times*

An explosive hitting lineup and effective pitching showcased the strengths of the Cranford High School girls' softball team when it scored eight runs in the first inning to earn a 12-4 victory over Westfield in Westfield on April 19.

"We knew that we had to hit the ball. We knew they were going to play their outfield really deep, and we were thinking we would be able to take some extra bases here and there, but we were fortunate. The girls had something that they wanted to prove to themselves; that they were the team that they keep talking about and want to be, so they made a little bit of a statement today. My team played really well today," said Cranford coach Bob Bruno.

Julie Saragusa belted two home runs and had four RBI in her four plate appearances. On the mound, she yielded three earned runs on 12 hits, retired four batters and walked one. Melissa Moreno also went 3-for-4, including a two-run homer and an RBI single. Stephanie Bagniewski banged a two-run single, and Allison Verrelli had a double and a RBI bunt single. Izzy Acton and Jess Casale each had two hits and an RBI to lead the Cougars' 14-hit attack.

Blue Devil pitcher Shannon Schaefer yielded eight runs in the first inning but regained her control through the following five innings. Schaefer, who led the Blue Devils' 12-hit offense, powered three hits and two RBI. Natalie Tupper whacked an RBI single, and Julia Criscuolo provided a run. Chrissy Ferraro,

Elena Scarano and Audrey Peterson each contributed two hits.

The 6-1 Cougars set the stage with eight runs on a six-hit assault in the first inning, highlighted by Bagniewski's two-run RBI single, Casale's RBI single and Saragusa's two-run blast to deep centerfield.

"I think all the credit goes to Cranford today. From the first pitch of the game, we were on our heels, and they put us there. They pitched to us great, she

was throwing strikes; they put the ball in play and put us on our heels and that's not a comfortable way to play a game. Laying down a couple of bunts, we're not expecting it, and all of a sudden you have a couple of runs on the board and we're in trouble. Today, they were definitely better than us, but I think we can hang with them in the future," said Blue Devil Head Coach Caitlin McDonald.

The 9-2 Blue Devils scored a run in the second. Peterson

tapped a single, dashed to second, moved to third and scored on Tupper's single into centerfield. In the third, after a brilliant double play by Schaefer, Peterson and Scarano (1-3-5), the Cougars did add a run to their total on Casale's bunt single, stolen base and Saragusa's single.

The Blue Devil bats sparked two runs in the bottom of the inning to make the score 9-3. Cali Chambliss and Ferraro each tapped singles, Schaefer followed with an RBI single, and Criscuolo

lofted an RBI sacrifice fly ball. Cougar sophomore centerfielder Casale made a big defensive play with Blue Devils manning second and third.

"I don't know if it even would be noticed. It was a little kind dink over the infield. She made it look really easy; came up throwing the ball home for the out," Coach Bruno said.

The Blue Devil defense also held tight in the fourth when catcher Elizabeth Fox nailed a Cougar heading to second.

"Our defense largely was good. First inning, they put down a couple of real nice bunts and made us panic and again, that's part of putting us on our heels. As far as all the routine plays, we made them, made a couple of exciting plays, especially Julia's (Criscuolo) play catching that line drive at second. That was awesome! Sara Seitz made a nice catch in left and Aditi Jain a nice catch in right, but it all comes back to that first inning. We are going to have to learn to not see as many strikes, be a little more aggressive." Coach McDonald said.

Three Cougars streaked across the plate in the sixth. Saragusa strolled to the plate and unleashed a solo blast to deep centerfield. Emily Snyder slashed a single followed by Moreno's two-run homer to centerfield.

"We try and take advantage of what another team's weakness is or what we may perceive what a weakness is. We saw some things and we took advantage and the kids did exactly what we practiced yesterday, and I think now when we go to practice, they'll take practice a little more serious, so we did a great job," Coach Bruno said.



*Story on page 15 of The Westfield Leader*

*More photos on "Photo Library" 12apr17-wf-cr-soft*

David B. Corbin for *The Westfield Leader and The Times*

**AWAITING THE THROW...** Cougar catcher Melissa Moreno prepares to catch the ball as Blue Devil Chrissy Ferraro, No. 16, slides home to score. The Cougars defeated Westfield, 12-4, in Westfield.

***Probitas Verus Honos***

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